CHILDREN OF NATURE

The Earl of Desart.

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CHILDREN OF NATURE.

Oh ! la fleur de l'Éden, pourquoi l'as-tu fanée,
Insouciante enfant, belle Ève aux blonds cheveux ?
Tout trahir et tout perdre était ta destinée.

Rolla.

CHILDREN OF NATURE.

A Story of Modern London.

BY

THE EARL OF DESART,

AUTHOR OF "ONLY A WOMAN'S LOVE," "BEYOND THESE VOICES."

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CHILDREN OF NATURE:

A STORY OF MODERN LONDON.

CHAPTER I.

Ye rich fwok aw, ye'll aye dui reet,
Ye peer fwok aw, ye'll aye dui wrang;
Let wise men aw say what they will,
It's money makes the meer to gang.

ANDERSON'S *Cumberland Ballads.*

LORD BROCKLESBY, thirteenth baron, was not a man that you can describe in two words. Esteemed clever from his youth up, and always showing promise which he always failed to fulfil, he had astonished his Eton tutor by the ease with which he could throw off Latin verses, which were, for the quantity, of pretty good quality. But they did not improve as to the latter attribute, and idleness soon restricted the former. At college, although he never shone legitimately in the schools, he was accounted for a term or two a great debater and a master of verbal fence at that little Parliament where Praed made mincemeat of Macaulay; but, nevertheless, his rivals always passed him. He never did more than enough to keep up a hazy character for cleverness, originally earned by the suddenness with which he had showed the restricted ability he did possess; and when he retired content with his Peer's degree, his contemporaries were just beginning to forget all

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about him. His mind might then have been likened to a vessel beating in short tacks against wind and tide, and perpetually missing stays; appearing to a spectator to be sailing bravely through the water, but yet never getting any nearer to the goal.

Now, having struggled to be a great man for half a century, and having neglected that county and parish work for which he was essentially fitted, he had at last resigned himself to the inevitable, and tried to be content as a patrician with slender influence, a moderate income, and two unmarketable daughters. There was a wife, too, but of her hereafter. Of course a man like Lord Brocklesby, although merged in the crowd of papas who bring ugly daughters to ugly houses in Eaton Square every season, and depart at the end of July with ugly feelings, could not be wholly repressed. He took up *theories*. He made for himself a theory on every conceivable subject, and was only too pleased that his affairs should go wrong, or that his relatives and friends should be in difficulties, that he might quickly trot out a brand-new theory which should—if there was any virtue in philosophic knowledge—put all straight again. He did everything by theory. All the clocks in his house were set to different times; for he observed that one of them was pretty sure to be right, and by discovering which this was, or by taking the mean time of all, you could be as well posted up in the matter as the Director of Greenwich Observatory.

He paid his cook in a singularly ingenious manner. By his side at dinner was placed a card, on which he made a mark of every help of food he took upon his plate; for, he argued, the better the cook the more helps you will take. He also noted on this card the appetite with which he sat down; for, as he said, refined and superior cookery aims not only at present satisfaction, but also at the enhancement of the capability for enjoyment on the morrow. These cards were stored up, and the marks added

together every quarter; but from this sum-total had to be subtracted other marks made in a book which he kept in his room, in which he entered any ailments he might suffer from—one mark, for instance, for those not proceeding directly from the stomach, but ten for indigestion or such-like outrages on a cooking animal. The result was arrived at by a scale he had devised, according to which the cook was paid; but as the dinner cards passed through the hands of butler and cook, the latter functionary took care, by a judicious addition of marks, to be as well remunerated as any other member of his noble profession.

Again, the salary of his gamekeeper in Ireland was regulated by the number of packs of grouse he was able to show him at the beginning of the season; and every August poor Lord Brocklesby made a dreary expedition over his nearly birdless moors, being shown, by a strategic arrangement worthy of Count Moltke, the same pack over and over again. One theory of his had given a good deal of trouble when the family came to town for the bringing "out" of his two daughters—namely, that these young ladies should be dressed by contract by the milliner in their county town; and it required all Lady Brocklesby's diplomacy to avert so terrible a fate. When his lordship was Postmaster-General, a theory he entertained, and was very nearly putting into practice, that all letters, unless they showed upon their face a declaration by the writer that there was nothing of an indecent, immoral, or defamatory nature inside, should be opened before delivery by the District Postmaster, kept the whole Ministry in an agony of terror for a week; and when he insisted on taking all the ballast out of his yacht to prove the truth of a theory of sailing he had developed, he said, from watching the ducks in the pond at home, his friends began to think of the expediency of some restraint being put upon him. His cruise on this occasion was no farther than the Needles, for then his vessel lay on her beam-ends, and he had some difficulty in getting back to the safe waters of

the Solent. He was afflicted, too, in these later years, with an absence of mind that caused him to make ridiculous mistakes. On one occasion it almost required force to remove him from the House of Commons to the more exalted Chamber, he having forgotten his translation, although some fifteen years since. His retiring to rest in the first bedroom he could find when attending a ball, and the subsequent astonishment of the distinguished hostess at finding him there (for it was her room he had chosen), is a well-known joke at the Clubs. The insults he was guilty of through saying the right thing to the wrong person were innumerable; had he been able to perform miracles he would have made the deaf to see and the blind to hear.

Lady Brocklesby was a woman of the world. A daughter of the noble house of FitzCrewe, and, therefore, as everyone knows, niece of the late Duke of Cheshire (*the* Duke, who spent so much money in his youth, and denied himself even a toothbrush in his later years; and whose eldest son, the Marquis of Tarporley, was allowed the extravagance of a silver watch when he was thirty), she had every right to be a leader of society, and to consider her marriage with Lord Brocklesby, then a smart young man with some pretensions to intellect, a *mésalliance.* She might have been a success, for she was pretty, but all was spoiled by her notion that she was clever. She was entirely given up to a species of cunning, which she deemed diplomacy. Heaven had provided her with many good gifts, but she set up one only—this cunning—to worship, and, like all idols, it failed her at a pinch. She would scheme and intrigue mysteriously for days to obtain what outspokenness would have gained her at once; if she spoke the truth it was by accident, or because truth seemed at that moment to be more misleading than fiction. Suitor after suitor had been frightened away from her daughters' side by the pertinacity with which she acted on the horsedealers' maxim of praising bad points and

leaving good ones to speak for themselves. Hesitating men saw the bad points plainly enough, and, hearing them praised, lost all faith in the good ones.

And yet Lady Brocklesby had some power—the power gained by fear. She had made slander a fine art, although even in her skilful hand it now and then, like a boomerang in the hands of a novice, flew back and hit the thrower; but, never losing sight of the good old adage, she made sure of some result by a prodigality in the amount of mud with which she would bespatter an adversary. One of her strict rules was invaluable, and was the true secret of her power in the world—she never forgave nor forgot; and not content with this—which is, after all, a common Christian custom—she never let slip the earliest opportunity to return a blow. If a rival, having sat up too late or eaten too much supper the night before, stabbed her at luncheon time, that rival knew well that Lady Brocklesby's whole foil would transfix her before the day was over. Her justice had this advantage over the popular idea of the article, in that, while iron-handed, it was anything but leaden-footed. Another of her attributes, and one which surely attests her greatness, was that she possessed an infinite capability of imagining a wrong when she wished to avenge one. Queen Elizabeth, and other sovereigns nearer to our day have caused revolts for the purpose of punishing them; but none of them ever rose to the level of Lady Brocklesby, who concocted the wrong in her own mind as easily and pleasantly as she concocted the revenge. Loudly did she parade her misfortunes, eagerly did she drag aside the domestic curtain, plaintively did she gain sympathy and rouse indignation over her woe; and, like many an historian, she believed in her own fictions after a little ventilation of them, and what began as an ingenious lie in her mouth, ended as a truth which she honestly felt it was cruelty to doubt.

The eldest son and hope of the house, Spencer Chil-

lingham, member for the family seat of Sinnington, in Snarlshire, might be shortly described as a thinking machine in which the motive-power had been forgotten. He loaded himself with facts as an alderman loads himself with turtle-fat, and was utterly unable to digest them. The knowledge he had about him must have been enormous; but there it lay, a heavy, inert mass, as useful to himself or to the world at large as a fly in amber. He had taken up women's rights, and read so much on the subject that, beyond a hazy notion that trousers were disgraceful unless worn by the weaker sex, he carried away no conviction from that course of study.

He made a speech, at dinner-time, in the House of Commons, in favour of marriage with a deceased wife's sister, and flooded his few hearers with quotations from amorous bachelors and scraps of the Scriptures; but irreverent scoffers remained as unconvinced as ever; merely remarking that he would kill off a large family of sisters, if he talked much to them, in a short space of time.

He attended meetings in favour of yearly Parliaments, of abolition of the game laws, of abolition of capital punishment—in fact, he was so anxious to abolish so much that you would have expected a certain amount of truculence in his appearance, a taint of iconoclasm in his address.

Yet he was "the mildest-mannered man" that it was possible to see; in stature but five feet four, with narrow shoulders, sandy hair, and a nervous stutter. But he wore an eye-glass, which was to him what the enchanted rose in Thackeray's fairy-tale was to Prince Bulbo. When it fell with a clatter against his waistcoat buttons, you saw a little figure which inspired you more or less with an inclination to laugh; but when, with a twitch of the little head, and opening of the little mouth, and an alarming elongation of the little face, that glass was firmly restored to its place, you could hardly avoid quailing. It beamed, like a fiery note of interrogation, through

his conversation, and gave unlimited strength to his arguments, which appeared to proceed from it; and how could you answer an eye-glass? We have heard of a man who succeeded in life solely by virtue of a high, broad forehead, and twenty foreheads cannot match a sagely-posed eyeglass.

There were two daughters, Emily and Jane, the former somewhat red in the nose and sour in the temper, having, in the twelve or fourteen years since she was presented, endured many disappointments. Much in the spirit of the old lady on the wrecked ship, who, when the captain said they must now trust in Providence. exclaimed, "Has it come to that?" she had taken up religion as a last resource; and her mother, who rightly deemed a rector with a fair living would be better than nothing, did not at all discourage her devotional fervour. Jane, or Jenny, as her brother Jack called her, had not yet arrived at the time of life when curates could be acceptable; and her rather pretty smile, rosy cheeks, and neat little figure were to be seen in every drawing-room in London where young men and young women meet, and Coote and Tinney wake the echoes of the night.

Jack was the youngest of the family, and was most certainly its ornament. A not uncommon occurrence, as if Nature prefers to finish—like a French penman—with a flourish. But notwithstanding his superiority—possibly in consequence of it—he was in his family circle an Ishmael, or rather, we should say, he performed the part generally ascribed to the domestic cat. Whatever went wrong was put down to him; everything he said and did was twisted to his disadvantage; and he was not in consequence very sorry when he was obliged to accompany his regiment to Canada, and to confine his quarrels with his relations to a paper war. Between him and his youngest sister there was a certain friendship; but you cannot expect a girl "going out" in London to think much of an absent brother, who does not even know by

name the fine people whose doings would fill her letters, did she take the trouble to write to him.

The "family mansion," as it was termed by the house-agent when to let for the winter season, was mouldy, dirty, ugly and thoroughly respectable. Entering into its grimy hall on a fine day was apt to give an imaginative visitor a thrill of the kind felt when entering that wonderful place at Rome where the monks' skeletons grin upon you so queerly. There was an uncompromising heaviness and respectablity about the painted deal hat and umbrella stand, and an inquisitorial air in the face of the hall porter, as much as to say, "Are you one of us?" which set the hearts of the curates who called on Miss Emily a-beating, and which caused even the young blades who "looked up" Miss Jane the day after the ball, where they had stayed so long in the conservatory, to put their hands mechanically in their pockets, feel the gold therein, and calculate mentally how "a fellow" can live upon £500 a year.

It is a bright day in June: all the blinds of No. 119, Eaton Square, are pulled down; luncheon is just over, and the family are congregated in the drawing-room, in that listless, uncomfortable state which the introduction into the system of a large hot meal, at about the worst hour human beings ever chose for that ceremony, always entails. The Chillinghams were old-fashioned in some of their ways; and on the hottest day the leg of mutton or joint of beef would steam under the nose of his lordship, who would say a hurried grace, in which the word "Amen" alone was audible, wipe his brow, and distribute well-proportioned helpings to the perspiring family circle.

"Jane, dear," said Lady Brocklesby, taking up the *Morning Post* and carelessly turning over its pages, "did you say Lord Windermere intended to call to-day?"

"Yes, mamma," answered Miss Jane, starting: she had been narrowly inspecting an incipient spot upon her

fair cheek in the looking-glass. "Yes; he said he'd call before four, as he goes down to Newmarket this evening."

"Well, then, we can give those poor horses some rest, as we shan't want the carriage till night. It's no use telling his lordship that we must have two pair."

"Eh, eh? my dear!" said Lord Brocklesby, desisting in his efforts to induce, by wagging his head, a bullfinch in a cage to pipe his solitary tune. "Another pair? dear no! One pair's quite enough. The whole thing's a matter of habit; once get a horse in the habit of trotting, and he'd just as soon trot as stand still. Get him in the habit of standing idle in the stable, and you might as well have a clothes-horse. One pair's quite enough."

"Dear me, papa, do not talk such nonsense!" said his eldest daughter, somewhat snappishly.

It was her day for district-visiting, and the victory of the charitable spirit over the carnal instincts of the flesh —which leaned toward an arm-chair and a novel— always caused some little acerbity in her tone on these occasions.

Lord Brocklesby was about to prove his theory, when he was interrupted by an impatient exclamation from his elder son, who, seated on a straight-backed chair and armed with the family paper-knife—a huge weapon which lay usually on the round table, and fascinated you with its utilitarian ferocity of aspect—was perusing, contempt and defiance beaming from his eyeglass, one of those new monthly reviews which the illuminated of the earth shower nowadays so plentifully upon us.

"Trash! Ignorance! Here's a man pretending to instruct others, who absolutely repeats the old fallacies about sanctity of marriage—family life indispensible to a nation's welfare—the propagation of the human——"

"Spencer," said Emily, rising with some dignity, "you might at least wait till *I* am gone before commencing your impious and immoral harangues!" And with a look

in which a longing to go to sleep struggled with contempt for the rest of her family, she departed.

"Don't you say a word against marriage!" cried Jane, merrily.

Spencer put up his eyeglass and transfixed her.

"A word against marriage, Jane? If you *can* be serious for ten minutes, I will read the beginning of my article for the *Eclectic Magazine*, in which I prove that in the idea of marriage is the germ of all human wickedness. I begin in the garden of Eden, and——"

"And I don't care a fig-leaf for your argument," said his father, chuckling.

"You are getting coarser every day," said her ladyship, who was writing a letter.

"Perhaps another time will be better for you to read me that, Spencer," said Jane, timidly.

"Always another time! I'm not sure I care to read it to you at all," and Spencer, in a huff, resumed his article.

"Marriage," said Lord Brocklesby, who was always talkative after luncheon, "marriage is a capital thing—sometimes;" this word was added after a glance in the direction of the writing-table. "I knew a scamp once—in fact, a fellow that had been footman with us—stole some of the plate, and then married, and keeps a public-house. Oh no! by-the-bye, that was another man—no, this one was transported for forgery; or it was the other—I forget—but I know marriage is a very steadying thing. Perhaps a little change now and then——"

"Oh, papa!" cried Jane, "what a shocking idea!"

"Shocking!" echoed the wearer of the eyeglass. "What a parrot-cry that is. Do you know what cleverness consists in, Jane, nowadays? It consists in shocking people. You can only make them listen by upsetting their prejudices. Make them angry at first, and then——"

At this interesting moment a servant entered the room with some letters.

"From Jack, I see," said his lordship, handling the

one which he had received in a somewhat suspicious manner.

"Phonetic as usual, I suppose?" said Spencer.

"Dear old Jack!" sighed Jane.

"He really spends a great deal in postage," said her ladyship.

"Hope he don't want any money," murmured my lord.

"They're an affectionate lot," said the footman, as he closed the door.

Jack's letter ran thus:

"My dear Father,

"Before I announce to you the very important step in life which I have taken, I must ask you to remember that a whole year has passed since you knew me as a careless and, I fear, sometimes very foolish boy. Of course I know a year isn't much, but when one is on one's own hook, and seeing a good deal of many different kinds of life, it seems to me that one puts on a lot of experience very quickly. I feel at least five years older than when I got into such a row for putting my umbrella under the police-inspector's horse's tail. It *was* good fun though to see the beautiful way he lit on the top of his hat! and I really do believe, my dear father, that I should be incapable *now* of any such childish folly. You will say I am beating about the bush; but the fact is that my news, now I am putting it on paper, seems much more startling than it would to tell you face to face. I am married! I think I can see my mother's face when she hears it, for I know she considers all Americans are barbarians——"

"An American!" faltered Lady Brocklesby.

"But if she only knew my darling little Alice she would soon alter her opinion. Well, I had better tell you all about it as quickly as I can, and don't be angry with me

till the end of my letter; and be angry with me, or say I have not acted rightly then, *if you can*. She is simply the prettiest, best, most—never mind—you'll see her soon."

"He is very kind," said Lady Brocklesby, with a sneer.

"You know that I took my leave fishing in the backwoods this year. I left Montbec with Charlie Fairfield, but Old Grumpy—I mean Colonel Grampion—soon telegraphed for him to come back, as there was not an officer to each company. Such bosh, wasn't it? So I was left alone. Well, I wandered about with my Indians, and fished a little and read a volume of Shelley that Charlie had lent me, over and over again, till I got to feel quite sentimental, and began to long to see some one to speak to besides the dusky fellows—capital chaps though in their way—but then they wouldn't understand Shelley. I'm not quite sure I did; but he made me feel just as I used as a boy, at evening church, when too few candles were lit and they sang a pretty hymn. Some fellows are always having adventures, and I have often longed to have one of my own. It came now with a vengeance.

"One day—just as I had almost made up my mind to go back to Montbec, although I knew Old Grumpy would collar me for duty at once if I did, and I had a fortnight's more leave to run—I came upon a pretty little Indian village, in which there seemed to be a commotion. The name of the place was nearly unpronounceable and quite unwritable; but it was something like Cocknawelago.

"I made out, after some trouble, that the commotion was caused by the extreme illness of a chief—they were Blackfeet—who seemed uncommonly popular; and they all were anxious to know if I had any medicine with me. I had some quinine left, and of course I went at once to the chief's hut. To my astonishment he was not an Indian (I had often heard there were a few civilised beings

among the Blackfeet, but nevertheless finding one was odd), and, moreover, a gentleman. There didn't seem to be much more life in him, and my quinine, I fancy, did more harm than good. I believe he only took it to please me. Poor man! His joy at seeing one of his own class was excessive. He said he had scarcely seen one for ten years, as he avoided the towns. It's no use my writing to you now the story he told me of his life, and how he came to be in this position. He was evidently a gentleman, and a dying one too, so that there was every reason to believe he spoke the truth. He had nothing to be ashamed of, but had been very unfortunate.

"'I am not afraid to die now,' he said to me at last, 'for I see by your face I can trust you. I was in the army once myself, and, as one brother-officer to another, I ask you on your honour to protect my daughter.'

"You can imagine my astonishment all the more when he went on to say that she was in the hut. To make a long story short—he died; and at his death-bed I first saw Alice. She was left quite alone in the world. If her father had relatives he never mentioned them, nor had she any clue by which she could trace them. At the age of eight she was taken away from towns and from civilisation and taught to be happy in the wild life they led. She told me she had been very happy, and I was again astonished to find how much more she knew than all the long bills to private tutors and Eton masters you have paid—my poor father—had taught me. Mr. Spranger—that was his name, Colonel John K. Spranger, once of Boston—had been her school master. I was going to say he had been her mother, for she had never known one; but at any rate he had made her love him very dearly. Her grief at his loss was terrible; she looked so lovely, so innocent, so helpless. Even you, papa, would have thought as I did—that there could be nothing better than always to see such eyes, always to meet such a

sweet, sad smile. I did not know what to do; all I did know was that she could not stay with the Blackfeet. Even these curious old chaps, the head warriors, saw that, but they were all very sorry to part with her. I took her away, and we made tracks for the nearest town, Anaba. I couldn't leave the poor child, you know, and yet of course it seemed odd our being together; for she was eighteen and I am not so very old. The worst part of it is that I look still younger than I am. After all, twenty-four is a very respectable age. At every hotel there were fusses, till we agreed to call ourselves brother and sister. Oh! I learned so to love her during that journey—much more than one can love a sister——"

"Well, I'm sure," put in Miss Jane, with a toss of her pretty head.

"And you can guess the end. What could she possibly do for herself if left alone? No man could have deserted her. I know, if you had been in my place some years ago, father, you would have done as I did—I married her at St. Albans, Maine, and we love each other, I really and truly believe, as no two human beings ever loved before. You need not be afraid, because she was brought up among the Indians, that she is *gauche*, or in any way unfit to mix in society. Mr. Spranger had travelled a great deal, and evidently been always among the best people wherever he went. She knew a great deal more than I did about everything, even about London and English towns and things of that sort. Her father had always got newspapers from the towns, though he never would enter them, and had kept himself well up in European politics. I found a copy of the 'Quarterly Review' in the hut and a manuscript about 'The Indian Races in America,' which I must get published when I come home. He was a very clever man I am sure; though, how he contrived to dress his daughter so that, although not of

course 'in the fashion,' she was not remarkable, beats me; I declare her get-up was quite as good as I have often seen on Jane or Emily at Sinnington——"

Both Jane and Emily smiled a little contemptuously here.

"And as to her manners, if duchesses have better manners than others she might have been one. Well, I overstayed my leave. I was too happy to remember Old Grumpy, and got such a wigging when I got back; and weren't all the fellows astonished when I introduced them to *my wife!* No one could help liking her though. Old Grumpy put on a pair of patent leather boots—which gave him torture before a week was out—and as to Dalesman—our major, you know—he declared I had acted very wisely. He knows the world well, too, does Dalesman (his uncle, Sir Thomas Dalesman, is the man who won the Derby last year, you know); so you see I have some *sense* on my side.

"I know you will all dote upon her when she comes home. Tell Jennie that Alice means to be *great friends* with her. And now, my dear father, I should very much like to have your advice as to staying in the regiment or not. Of course I am awfully fond of the fellows, and Alice is a great favourite already—a regular queen of the regiment. Dalesman has been tremendously kind, and given up to me his field-officer's quarters. But all the same, I find the expenses very heavy for a married man, and the Colonel—who is not a bad old chap, barring when he has the gout—seems to think it is not what he calls 'correct' for me to live with my wife in quarters. So I fancy that I ought to sell, and see whether I can get anything at home that would bring me in more than soldiering does. Write and tell me what you advise. I never wrote so long a letter before; but I want you to persuade my mother that I have not done so foolish a thing as she

will think it at first. With best love to her and to my sister, and to Spencer, if he is with you,

"Ever your affectionate Son,

"JACK CHILLINGHAM."

The effect of this communication upon the family circle may be imagined. Lady Brocklesby turned green with rage, while the head of the family swore audibly, and Miss Jane forgot to be shocked thereat.

After all had given vent to their feelings of surprise, horror, and indignation, the natural desire of people of the world to make the best of a bad job supervened; and, after a lengthy family council, it was decided that Jack should be advised to sell out and come to England, when the family influence should be used to advance his interests.

Lady Brocklesby wrote the letter, which was studiously cold, and made scarcely any mention of Alice, and then his lordship copied it, adding, however, a postscript of his own, which his wife did not see, and which was as follows:

"A scheme has been floating in my head for some time, and your foolish behaviour decides me to attempt to give it effect. I propose that a Younger Sons' Benefit Society be formed, to which each younger son (of our class) shall, from his coming of age, subscribe so much per annum. The difference between this and usual benefit societies will consist in the fact that the charities will be given, not at the death, but at the marriage of the members. We will talk it over when you come. God bless you, you silly boy!"

Not many months after the despatch of this epistle a young couple landed at Liverpool. He, a frank, hand-

some lad, such as may be often met with in this country, with laughing blue eyes, broad shoulders, and a sunny honest smile; and she, simply a lovely woman. Her figure was perfect, straight, symmetrical, graceful. Masses of dark-brown hair, of the shade which is unbuyable, were coiled round her small head, and the only fault you could have found with her face was that it mocked your endeavours to decide as to when it was most charming. Is it not in one of George Eliot's novels that the heroine's eyes are compared, in their dreamy wistfulness, to those of a dog?

Alice Chillingham's eyes seemed always to be asking for something—not with that bold, hungering look which is much the fashion among certain ladies that we know, but unconsciously and shyly; and there was a latent power of fierceness in them, too, that seemed to indicate that the worship they could not help asking must be kept within due bounds.

Innocent of evil, ignorant of the world, which nevertheless she had been educated in some measure to meet, she steps into our tale a lady by birth, for was she not a true child of nature?

* * * * * *

Among the letters which met Jack Chillingham at Liverpool, there was one which we may as well transcribe. It was from the friend of his school-days, with whom he had managed to keep up that rarity among the male sex —a pretty regular correspondence.

"Married and done for, my dear Jack! 'Needles and pins, needles and pins,' eh? How a conscientious nursery-maid, probably 'keeping company' with the footman, could have instilled such cynical poison into our infant minds I know not. Perhaps she looked upon needles and pins as a useful part of a *trousseau*.

"Do you remember old H——, at Eton, and his fearful speech when one of us was trembling before the birch—'I'll make you unable to sit down for a week, sir.' Why, my dear Jack, you've gone and made yourself unable to sit down for life! Married at four-and-twenty! Good gracious! By the time you are beginning to understand how to enjoy life you will find your son treading on your heels, making love to the same woman as yourself, black-balling you at the Club, and giving the Jews post-obits on your life. You may *feel* as young as you like; you will have to take to an alpaca umbrella and square-toed boots. How I shall laugh to see you at the Zoo, with your family, putting down a bag of nuts and half-a-dozen buns while you wipe the nose of Augustus Edward, while Alfred Plantagenet takes the opportunity of putting his hand through the bars of the hyæna's cage, and Gloriana Mathilda, feeling herself neglected in favour of her brother's nose, screams so that a crowd collects and hoots you for ill-using her. And then, when you travel! I think I see you 'taking baby' in your carriage because the nurse feels faint, not having had a glass of porter or other refreshment for at least half an hour; or collecting your luggage—five enormous black cases for your wife, and seven corded trunks for nurse and staff, and a rickety old biscuit-box which holds things the said staff finds it absolutely necessary to have at hand during the shortest journey. Or I can imagine you in the Brompton Road bargaining for a double perambulator, and getting eight-eenpence off it if you take it without the fringe of the parasol.

"I suppose you'll shave your moustache and grow those squat whiskers which go so well with paterfamiliasian respectability. The first, I understand from good authority, you *must* do, as babies will not stand them at kissing time; and, with a baby, I am also credibly informed, all times are kissing times. I haven't got a present yet, but my idea is to invest in a magnificent copy,

bound in calf, of a little volume I once saw somewhere, 'Dr. Somebody on the Rearing and Management of Infants;' and I might add a treatise of my own, to be called, 'Sweet Slobberings, with a Short Dissertation on Pap.' Eh? Don't be angry, old chap. I can't help laughing at the idea of your really being—what I have always regarded with mingled feelings of pity and admiration—*a married man!* Mind you send me a line directly you reach town to say where you are. London is cram full, and I am enjoying myself immensely. My sister—you know Nelly?—says she is sure she shall like your wife; and my queer old aunt, Lady Meldrum (called Mrs. Malaprop, generally, though not of course by her dutiful nephew) declares she delights in Americans—they are so 'aboriginal.' By-the-bye, she (Lady M.) gives a ball on Wednesday. Why not let it be Mrs. Chillingham's (I nearly wrote Mrs. Jack's) first experience of a London ball? Don't let her humbug you with the idea that she's got no time to get a gown—women always have gowns when they want to go anywhere. That's the experience of your old pal and sincere one,

"BADSWORTH.

"P.S.—If you're allowed a little wager I can put you on a real good thing for the Ascot Stakes. *Verb. sap.*"

CHAPTER II.

Never the earth on his round shoulders bare
A maid trained up from high or low degree,
That in her doings better could compare
Mirth with respect, few words with courtesy,
A careless comeliness with comely care,
Self-guard with mildness, sport with majesty.

SIDNEY'S *Arcadia.*

THE balls at Meldrum House were—for whatever reason no one could exactly tell—estimated as somewhat superior to most large gatherings of the kind. The wine was no better; the company was not particularly select; the house was not more fitted for dancing than many others; but it had been decided by that mysterious and whimsical power called Fashion, that the Meldrum House balls were good; and good in consequence they were universally esteemed. Lady Meldrum had the knack of securing some interest in the shape of a foreign lion, or a new comic "entertainer," or a band from a wild country, which played out of time on strange instruments; and it was well known that her laws as to invitations were as fixed as Fate. No one whose name was not on that visiting-list could hope to enter the portals of the big, dingy house in B—— Square. She was, besides, a proficient in the art of rudeness, and those who escaped her darts (after all, the majority) admired in a timorous way the perfect indifference with which she would hurl a piece of clumsy but stinging contempt at the greatest as well as the smallest of her acquaintance. A good-natured, ill-educated, vulgar-looking, and rather vulgar-thinking old woman, her position at the head of "Society" was as curious as that of the fly in amber, or the frog in stone; and thoughtful lookers-on found her a more puzzling fact than even the

apple in the dumpling was to our worthy monarch. Natural ignorance and petulance having caused her at the outset of her career to commit what would have been terrible *gaucheries* in one less highly placed, she had the shrewdness (which is cunning stripped of malevolence) to see that anything original is acceptable to "Society," as long as its originality wars only with individuals, and not with "Society" itself. A sort of female mixture of Beau Brummel and Dan O'Connell; full of impudence, ignorance, wit, self-confidence, and good-temper, she was what the high-pressure of the nineteenth century life alone could produce—a creation which not even the poet of all time, who exhausted worlds and then imagined new, could ever have pictured to himself in his wildest dreams.

And to think that that high yellow barouche, after which Guardsmen and Foreign Office clerks smile and murmur, "There goes old Malaprop," should call up such thoughts as these! But every created thing has its use; and a vulgar "leader of Society" does a good deal for the old argument which Burns gave voice to in his song, 'For a' that, and a' that."

All in this world may be earned except that thing without a name, which perhaps the word "refinement" best expresses. Let refinement be unnecessary for social success, and there will be plenty of galling, of proud "kibes;" the field-marshal's *baton* will be in many a private's knapsack.

It is a pity that advocates of equality do not know more of "Society." Its present rules of advancement they could no more take exception at than could they at those of the Stock Exchange. The age of social prejudice is dead.

Lady Meldrum's ball on this occasion was "to have the honour of meeting H.R.H. So-and-So," and even her nephew, Lord Badsworth, found it none too easy to procure an invitation for his friend and his wife.

"It's all very well, Frank," said my lady, "but a man

with a wife is a nuisance, particularly a newly-married man, who knows nobody, with a newly-married wife——"

"He could scarcely have anything else," put in Lord Badsworth.

"Who knows nobody either. Now if she was pretty——"

"So she is," said the young lord.

"How do you know?"

"Because Jack Chillingham always had perfect taste, and wouldn't have married an ugly woman."

"Pooh!" said Lady Meldrum. "Your uncle had perfect taste, they say, once; and you see he married me. And as to men with taste marrying pretty women, I never shall forget—not if I live to be as old as Lady Megglefield—what I felt when I saw Mrs. Arthur Bray, the artist's wife, who is like a London statue after so many years' exposure to the soot, sitting in the very best seat at my concert the other night—the seat I had kept for Mrs. Belfort. How I bundled her out, and how angry poor Arthur was about it!" And she burst out laughing.

"I should think so," put in Lord Badsworth.

"Oh, it didn't matter. They neither of them could afford to quarrel with me. Bread and butter, my dear Frank."

"Well, aunt—so you won't ask Jack and his wife to your ball?"

"Do you think they—I mean she—is presentable?"

"After she's been here, she *must* be."

"Yes," said Lady Meldrum, seriously, "of course it *would* give her a great start. Poor thing! Well, she may come; but look here, Frank, I shall trust to you to see that she does not commit any absurdities—valse with her husband, or say 'Sir' to anyone, or talk about being 'crowded' after supper like the girl in *Punch*, because, you see, I've all the best people in London coming—you *should* have seen Lady Sandymount's face when I refused her an invitation point-blank—and I don't want anything to go wrong."

"My dear aunt," said Lord Badsworth, "from a long and careful study of human nature, I am convinced that anyone entering your house must at once become infected with the principles of good taste and propriety; and as to *any* woman in these enlightened days dancing with her own husband——"

"That'll do, Frank," interrupted the old lady, rising abruptly from her writing-table, where she had been looking through her visiting-list. "Now you can go. I expect Flittery here directly, and he hates the sight of you."

"As I do of him," said he, taking up his hat.

"Oh, he's the dearest little man! He's my Red Indian: brings all his scalps—and he scalps everyone—to my wigwam. He's *such* a character!"

"If he keeps for himself all those he takes from others he ought to have a funny one." And with this Lord Badsworth left his worthy aunt to receive her expected visitor, after having obtained the card which opened to Jack Chillingham and Alice the portals of Meldrum House.

When in one of those neat lodging-houses with which the small streets running out of Piccadilly abound, he was, shortly afterwards, introduced by Jack to his wife, he felt that he had been indeed pleading in a worthy cause. Plainly, but prettily dressed, shy enough to charm, but not enough to repel or to cause shyness to others, her beauty enhanced by those looks of confidence and love she could not help casting now and again towards her husband, Alice was indeed one for whom, in olden days, armour-clad cavaliers would have delighted to joust each other to pieces. In her innocence of society and the ways thereof there was no silliness—none of that ugly awkwardness which is so remarkable in the British schoolroom, and which it takes all the arts and wiles of a D'Egville to eradicate in time for the first Drawing-Room. The daughter of an exile who had elected to abandon

civilisation, having seen scarcely anyone but savages hitherto, and having had few companions but her dogs, her birds, and the flowers, which are so companionable to a solitary and therefore romantic child, Nature had evidently predetermined she should be "a lady."

And a lady she was, from the coil of brown hair so cunningly arranged to show off the perfect shape of her head, to the tiny points of her bewitching bronze toes. Badsworth had expected prettiness, with probably a nasal twang, and a rusticity which would amuse him, and was startled by the composed, merry *naïveté* with which his account of his struggle for the card was received.

"I am so glad you brought it," she said, smiling; "for now I know one man in London, and shall have one partner, at any rate—that is, if you'll let me dance;" and she turned to Jack, who was contemplating with delight the effect she had evidently produced upon his friend.

"Of course, I should think so, dear. And as to your knowing no one in town, we're about in the same boat. Except old Eton friends, or fellows who may have been at the same tutor's as I was, I declare I don't know a soul."

"Oh, we'll soon remedy that," said Badsworth; "and my aunt's ball will be a capital place to begin. I shall constitute myself Lord Chamberlain to their Royal Highnesses Prince and Princess Jack of Chillingham to-morrow night, and make everyone give me a huge card to read their names from. What are your royal highnesses' rules as to introductions to your court?"

"Oh!" said Alice, "they are very simple. All the men must be handsome and dance well, and all the women must be good-natured and dress well."

"By Jove!" cried Badsworth. "You'll have a very small court then—at least in London. I might manage half-a-dozen men nearly up to the mark, but good-natured, well-dressed women! Fancy any well-dressed woman being

good-natured when she saw another woman equally well-dressed!"

"That reminds me," put in Jack, "that there'll be precious little time for your dress to be finished, dear. If that infernal Madame—whatever her name is—doesn't send it in time, I declare I'll—never pay her bill."

"What fun it will be!" said Alice. "Why, I've never danced with you, Jack—you never gave me a ball at Montbec, as dear Captain Fairfield promised—but now won't we have a turn!"

Badsworth coughed nervously. "Well, you see, Mrs. Chillingham, it isn't exactly the custom in London for wives ——"

"Don't married women dance here?" And Alice's face fell.

"Oh yes—dear me, yes—they dance, but they don't dance with their own husbands—only with other people's husbands."

"Never mind," said Jack, coming to the rescue, as Alice coloured at the idea of having said something stupid. "We'll defy etiquette—we did it before, eh?—and dance, despite all the dowagers in Europe." And then Jack—Alice putting in a word now and then—gave a full and circumstantial account of their momentous journey, and the three young people laughed till they cried at Jack's description of the wedding and its attendant difficulties.

"By-the-bye," said Badsworth, as he stood at the open door on his way out, "the Eccentrics meet to-night. Would you let your husband come there after the ball, Mrs. Chillingham?"

"He mustn't sit up very late," said Alice, with perhaps the least shade of acidity in her tone. The best of wives cannot avoid slight jealousy of her husband's old friends.

"What on earth are the Eccentrics?" asked Jack.

"Oh, it's a club got up by Johnny Beere, Alf Taylor, and some other of that set. We meet once a week to talk or read our own effusions, if they're funny; and though

we're all uncommon good in reality, we try to think we are *esprits forts*, and believe in nothing—except, of course, Women. There's some clever talk sometimes. Johnny Beere's great fun, and several lawyer chaps tell capital stories; and the poet of the future is too good, when kept within bounds. You'd better come."

"I'll think about it," said Jack. And, of course, when Badsworth was gone, Alice reproached herself for having, even in thought, wished to prevent Jack enjoying himself; and after an amicable contest, in which kisses were the principal weapons, he resigned himself with the air of a martyr to doing what he wished.

There is a well-worn story of a pig, and the ingenious manner in which his Hibernian driver got him to Cork. It is strange that husbands so seldom see in it only a parable addressed to them.

"What a beast of a thing a hired brougham is!" said Jack, as they rattled over the stones with a series of jerks suggestive of the coachman going to sleep every few minutes, and waking himself by administering correction to his unfortunate horse. "I must go and settle about having one from Peters' to-morrow."

"Oh, Jack, do you think we can afford it?" said Alice, with a gasp, as her back was nearly broken by the effects of an unusually sudden awakening on the part of the coachman.

"Oh dear yes; everyone says it's much cheaper than cabs in the long run. Thank God! here we are. Lost your gloves? By Jove! haven't you any more? It would never do to go in without gloves. Do try your pockets, Alice!" And Jack panted with heat and excitement, and felt the first delicate twinge of matrimonial—what shall we say?—infelicity. Luckily, the gloves were discovered under the seat, and in a few moments our young couple were ascending the broad and easy staircase of Meldrum House, accompanied by Badsworth, who had met them in the hall.

"Lord Badsworth—Mr. and Mrs. Chillingham," shouted the man at the bottom of the stairs.

"Lord Badsword—Mr. and Mrs. Sinningham!" shouted the man on the landing.

"Lord Badwords—Mr. and Mrs. Sinagain!" roared the man close to Lady Meldrum's elbow.

"Why, we sound like three wicked people out of the 'Pilgrim's Progress,'" whispered Badsworth in Alice's ear, as she approached the lady of the house; who, covered with diamonds, and rosy-red from the labour of shaking hands, was scrutinising her through a gold-rimmed eye-glass.

"Quite pretty, I declare, and nothing of the Yankee about her. You know the story, Mr. Flittery? Met her in the train, and married her before they'd gone ten miles. Quite a common thing in America, I'm told; and the guards take holy orders so as to be useful. How d'ye do, Lady Pimlico? Oh, you've brought *both* your girls, I see; I only asked *one*. Dear me! look at the duchess! She's fatter than ever. I hope she won't dance—the house is old."

And so the old lady rattled on, her little speech about Alice having been made in a loud tone while the poor child was close to her, with as much composure as if she were part of the furniture. Mr. Flittery stroked his refined black moustache with his delicate white hand, and departed in search of some one to introduce him to this new beauty, while Badsworth, feeling some pleasure at the remarks she elicited, conducted Alice to one of the inner rooms, and obtained a *vis-à-vis* in the approaching quadrille. Jack feeling rather out of his element, sauntered listlessly about and longed to see a familiar face. He reflected, too, with some trepidation, that his mother and sister were pretty sure to attend this ball, and that, as he had not yet been to Eaton Square, or presented his wife, Lady Brocklesby might in all probability be inclined to vent her anger on Alice. It had been by Badsworth's

advice that he had not at once hurried like a dutiful son to his parent immediately after reaching town.

"I wouldn't," his lordship had said. "That letter was intended to be as cold as possible. They don't at present mean to be very nice to your wife. Let them see she *could* do without them. Let them see that you and she have other friends: you may be sure if my aunt or any other biggish people take her up—and they can't help it when they've seen her—your mother will be glad to follow suit. You know, old chap, I wouldn't say anything to hurt you, but Lady Brocklesby is—just a trifle-worldly; and your wife asked out and admired, and not seeming to want her help, will be quite a different thing to your wife dashing straight to them for patronage and assistance."

Jack had thought the advice good, but he felt nevertheless some perturbation at the near approach of the meeting with his outraged parent.

To his intense delight he at length espied the face of an old school friend, or rather one who had been at school with him, and now only ranked as a friend in consequence of his isolated position.

"Hollo, Keyser!" said he.

"My dear Chillingham, how are you?" said Mr. Keyser, rather astonished at the warmth of the other's greeting. "Where've you been? I haven't seen you for some weeks."

"I haven't been in London for four years," said Jack, almost indignantly.

"God bless my soul! Haven't you? By Jove! Quite a new boy. Well, you've had the best of it. We're all very stupid here; even our wickedness doesn't make us amusing," and the speaker gave a weary glance around him, as one who should say, "All is vanity."

"I don't suppose people here are worse than anywhere else," said Jack "or than they have always been."

"Ah! you've been away, you see," said Keyser, crossing

his arms and gazing sternly at the throng of hot dancers. "You don't know what a pitch we've come to. There'll be an awful explosion soon," and he nodded, and seemed to be capable of prophesying terrific woe.

"Dear me!" said Jack. "How?"

"I daresay there are fifty or sixty young married women here to-night," said Mr. Keyser.

"Well?"

"Well; out of them I don't believe there is one with a rag of character."

Jack must have looked very horrified, for a gentle smile stole over the stern determination of the other's face.

"Not a rag. Morality is scattered to the winds. They're all the same. It only takes one season—not always so much—to make them so. You think any of those couples dancing there are innocently amusing themselves? Pooh! They're all laying plans for deceiving their husbands. Luckily, we who have not been fools enough to marry——"

Jack hemmed uncomfortably, and Mr. Keyser, who seldom found so good a listener, went on in a melancholy tone; "We, I say, can look on with calmness, if with sadness. Look at that young fellow there, with the square shoulders and fair beard. That's young Windermere, who last year came into the largest property in England. Half a county, coal, iron, all kinds of nice things. What's his purpose, his use in life? To have what the French call 'good fortunes.' He has caused two divorces already, and there's a third ought to come off; only the husband is nice and blind, you know——"

"I don't quite understand," said Jack, whose eyes were fixed upon this ogre's partner.

"Windermere is so rich he can manage very often to buy the husband as well as the wife. Look at him now—he's got a fresh victim, you see. Evidently a newly-married woman. He's saying the same things to her he

has said to all the others. Look how she listens to him! No doubt her unfortunate husband is safe in bed at home, and she'll humbug him about the dull ball she's had to-morrow morning, and then some fine day he'll find out——"

"Stop—confound you!" cried Jack, hotly; "that's my wife!"

In the meantime Alice was making a very decided success. She was not followed by "a murmur of admiration," because such a thing never occurs, save in a novel; nor did people stand on chairs to gaze at her, as they are reported to have done when the Gunning sisters first shone upon St. James's Court; but there was a perfectly well-defined conviction in everyone's mind at Meldrum House that night that she was the prettiest woman in the room.

And she rather lost her head. The men, who one after the other implied to her, without a *soupçon* of impertinence, that she was charming, were so different to the gallant officers of the 110th, whose attentions were always stupid or overdone. When Lord Windermere, with the frank air which had deceived so many, assured her that it was a real relief to them in town to be surprised; and, although they thought a good deal of their own beauties, they *had* been surprised to-night—when little Mr. Flittery confided to her that the beautiful Duchess of Starville had retired angrily to bed—when H.R.H. danced his third time with her—she could not help being flattered, and her only woe was that Jack did not come and, as it were, take part in her triumph.

She looked at Jack and herself as being so entirely one, that it was hard to be obliged to enjoy anything without him; and he, standing gloomily in the doorway, was cursing the fate which had made him a second son and lieutenant in a marching regiment, instead of a young duke with twenty palaces and a conquering air amongst women. Jack had always considered himself rather a dandy in the garrison-towns he had defended; but here,

among all these men who seemed so entirely at their ease, his coat obstinately wrinkled at the collar, his boots turned up at the toe and looked plebeian, and as to his gloves, and his hands in them—where to keep them so as to combine ease with elegance was more than he could devise.

Mr. Keyser's monologue on the depravity of London morals had also, absurd as it was, contributed to depress him, and he was not sorry when the smiling face of his mother appeared in view, and his misery, if he was to have misery, promised to become active instead of passive.

Whoever had witnessed the meeting of mother and son would have gone to bed that night and blessed Heaven for allowing so much maternal love still to remain in our cold world; yet there was no affection in Lady Brocklesby's heart for her handsome second son. Her crafty, intriguing nature unconsciously rebelled against his frank honesty, and she felt his fearless glance almost an insult; why she could not tell. There is no doubt that dishonesty has more dislike for honesty than honesty for its reverse, and with reason.

She had not been long in the ball-room before she espied Alice, who was then dancing with the Royalty, and, forgetting her Republican origin, was experiencing and showing that pleasure which Royalty has always the power of giving to those loyalists by nature, women.

"Dear me," said her ladyship, "who is that lovely woman dancing with his Royal Highness?"

"That," said a stander-by, who could not allow himself to appear ignorant, "that is the great American beauty, the heiress we have all heard of—millions of dollars and ever so many marble palaces!"

"Ah, Jack," sighed she, turning to her son, whom she insisted on keeping near her to introduce him to "people he ought to know"—"there, if you'd done something of *that* sort—millions of dollars!"

"I did something of that sort," said Jack, smiling, "though without the millions of dollars, and not one marble palace, because that lady happens to be Alice."

Lady Brocklesby turned—not white, that she could not do when in her war-paint, but a shade paler in the few spots where it was possible, and bit her lips angrily. That the daughter-in-law she had intended to keep down and patronise in a lofty manner, the poor Yankee girl who had caught her fool of a son, and upset all her plans for the aggrandisement of the family—for of Spencer she had ceased to have any hope—should be so lovely, so evidently admired, dancing with a Prince of the Blood Royal!

That she should even be here in this exclusive house at all! It was very mortifying, and the poor woman for a moment was in danger of showing her mortification; but the weakness passed off, and she was able to congratulate Jack in cordial terms on the beauty of his bride. Jane was honestly in ecstasies, and thought with rapture how far preferable such a chaperon would be to her mother.

Strange, perhaps, it may seem, but a girl reaps many advantages from being often with a pretty married woman. Although not the rose, the proximity brings her some of its odour; and instead of comparing the two to the disadvantage of the girl, men are rather inclined to attribute to her some of the pleasure they have received in the company of the two. Of course, we allude to relatives; a girl who lives too much with married women after a few years is looked upon and treated as such by men, who would propose to her about as soon as they would run away with a solicitor's wife.

Alice Chillingham was agreeably surprised at the warmth of her mother-in-law's greeting, and she and Jane were bosom friends in ten minutes. Not that Alice was at all gushing, or over expansive to her own sex; but was not Jane Jack's sister?

Already poor Jane began to feel the advantage of having so pretty a sister-in-law; for, while they remained together, never had she been surrounded by so many of what she would have called "the best men" in the room. Even the Duke of Cheshire, who cordially disliked his cousin, was civil to her in order to join the little knot of which Alice was the centre, and continue one of those half-serious, half-laughing flirtations with which elderly gentlemen are obliged to solace themselves for the want of more real joys; a flirtation of chaffing compliment and repartee, which Alice kept up with a sublime, and to some of the hearers, almost impious, carelessness of the fact that she was addressing one of the greatest men in England, who had never been known before to stay so late at a ball, or say so many words to a woman in public.

"You must be very fond of your uncle," said Lady Brocklesby, as at last the Duke moved away.

"My uncle?" said Alice.

"Yes; that's the Duke of Cheshire—my cousin."

"Oh dear! I'd no idea—or I wouldn't——"

"I never saw him so amused before," interrupted her ladyship, smiling at Alice's confusion; "and, after all, there's no law against a man flirting with his niece."

"Now, Mrs. Chillingham, are you ready for supper?" said Badsworth.

"Did I promise you?"

"Certainly."

"Oh no; you promised to come to supper with me!" and Lord Windermere looked his most piteously innocent look.

"I thought I was to have the honour," murmured a little French *attaché*, who was accustomed to be thrown over.

"You're all wrong," said the merry voice of Johnny Beere, the "funny man" of society; "Mrs. Chillingham's just made a vow that, if I don't take her to supper, she'll never sup again."

"Well," said Alice, looking round with a bright smile, "as I can't go to supper with all of you, and as, if I choose one, the others might hurt him, I shall go to supper with this gentleman;" and, putting her hand on Jack's arm she gave a little saucy nod and moved away.

She did it so prettily that Jack was delighted, and no flirting couple in the supper-room enjoyed themselves so much as these two. Think of it, ye gods of etiquette—the husband with his own wife!

"Who the deuce is that fellow?" asked Lord Windermere.

"That's the President of the United States," said Beere. "He has a vested right to sup with all American women.'

"Her husband," put in Badsworth.

"Oh, that's Chillingham, is it?" said Lord Windermere, thoughtfully. "Hasn't got a rap, eh? What an infernal bore it must be to have a pretty wife and no money!" and his lordship lounged across the room to find some fair companion with whom to discuss champagne and plovers' eggs.

"If Windermere tries his hand there," said Badsworth to himself, "I'll——" but he did not finish the sentence, probably because he had decided on no course of action.

Everything, even a ball at Meldrum House, must have an end, and Alice was not sorry when, surrounded by officious youths, vying with each other as to who should place her cloak over her white shoulders, she awaited, (not without some anxiety on Jack's part as to the probable condition of the coachman) the coming up of the hired brougham.

"Remember you're coming to the Eccentrics," said Badsworth to Jack, as Lord Windermere handed Alice into the carriage.

"Oh yes, Jack," cried she, smiling rather sleepily out of the window, determined that her wish to "talk over" the ball with her husband should not stand in the way of his enjoyments.

"You must be eccentric if you sit up beyond this hour," said Jack, hesitatingly.

"So we are. We do nothing like other people. This is our regular hour for meeting; once a week. Come along; Johnny Beere's going. Good-night Mrs. Chillingham. We'll return your husband in time for morning prayers."

Lord Windermere's affability to Jack as they walked to Mount Street was beyond description; and Jack who had been inclined to resent his free-and-easy manner and air of being already intimate with Alice, quite changed his mind before they reached the gloomy mansion where the Eccentrics disported themselves, and vowed to himself that this fortunate youth was a "real good chap."

CHAPTER III.

Their speech
In loftiness of sound was rich,
A Babylonish dialect,
Which learned pedants much affect:
It was a party-coloured dress
Of patched and pye-balled languages.

Hudibras.

Following Badsworth and Windermere up a gloomy staircase, Jack found himself in a large barn-like room, evidently once a studio, in which some fifteen men were lounging and partaking of refreshments of the liquid order The air was thick with smoke, and this, combined with an insufficiency of gas, produced a sinister effect, which was enhanced and made almost awful by the low tones in which the several groups were speaking.

Jack silently sat down upon a vacant chair, and felt as if he were intruding on a Shaker prayer-meeting.

"This is your first visit to the Eccentrics?" asked a man, with his face arranged after a Vandyke picture, who sat next him. "Yes?" "You will be astonished, sir, at what you hear. The conversation here is wonderful; its brilliancy is unknown elsewhere. You will be able to listen to tournaments here that the best *salons* of Paris couldn't give you. We all say what we think, sir."

"Oh!" said Jack, feeling that he was called upon for an observation, and wishing they would say their good things a little louder.

"Yes; we are enlightened and we show it. Mrs. Grundy isn't a member of the Eccentrics," and the Vandyke gentleman laughed, but still under his breath. "We don't talk here, sir," he went on, "we converse; we shirk no subject; we are shocked by no opinion. Only the other day we elected Walt Whitman a member."

Jack expressed his astonishment, although he had no clear idea as to who this gentleman might be.

"Yes, there is no conventionality about us. The only thing is," and here the speaker lowered his voice, "it may perhaps strike you that there is a little—a little constraint among the members."

"They all seem afraid to speak up," said Jack.

"So they are," answered the other, with suppressed triumph, "so they are. We don't tolerate stupidity here, sir, and they're all afraid of saying something stupid."

"Rather spoils the fun, doesn't it?" asked Jack, who began to think that bed would be preferable to this Elysium of modest if enlightened ones.

"Fun!" echoed he of the pointed beard—"fun! We don't come here for fun. We come to impart and to receive ideas. You see that group near the fireplace. They're probably talking about the new theory of atoms, or discussing Dean Wobbleboy's last discovery as to the identity of Ritualism with the worship of frogs. They're all clever men there and go deep, deep into matters. And there, by the window, with long hair and spectacles—you see that young man? He's an iconoclast—doesn't believe in anything."

"Does he believe in himself?" asked Jack.

"No; says he has no reason to believe himself to be himself. Then there's the man he's talking to—a poet—a poet of the future. Hasn't published anything yet; but when he does—whew!" and the speaker gave vent to a low whistle, expressive of the rapture of the world when these poems did appear. "Hush! he's getting up! He's going to read his last bit. Listen!"

A thrill went through the whole room, and all leant forward in eager attention as a pale and knock-kneed youth, with red hair and freckles as unintelligible as the stars of heaven, arose, and in a quivering treble thus proceeded:

"Some of the members have been kind enough to ask me to read a little thing—a very little thing—I scribbled

the other day. It is a humble endeavour to show—as all my writings are humble endeavours to show—that the highest form of æstheticism, the noblest kind of poetic utterances, is perfectly consonant with practical, and what is called everyday phraseology and business-like accuracy. Just as a chimney-pot, to a true lover of art in its unconventional sense, is as heart-stirring as a sunset, so the bare enumeration of facts, conveyed with an æsthetic purpose, is as lovely as all the rapturous vagueness which is generally called poetry. My little thing is called:

THE RETURN OF THE LOVER.

The weather got finer; the fleecy clouds, et cetera,
Seemed to open out and curtsy to the sun.
And all the world, tumultuously heaving, as it were
A woman sailing, unaccustomed, on the sea,
Brought up its richest treasures of sight and sound,
Its manifold riches of verdure, colour and electricity,
To welcome back the gentleman who loved the lady,
Loved her exceedingly;
And came, having made his fortune in the East London
Candle Company, Limited,
Came now with Two Thousand Five Hundred Pounds,
Eight Shillings and Tenpence per annum,
Secured, well secured, in the respecatable Consols,
And with his Joints, Sinews, Muscles, Veins, Arteries,
Cartilages, Bones, Fluids, Nerves,
Arms, Legs, Thighbones, Chest, Back, Breast,
Neck, Throat, Nose, Mouth, and Eyes,
Tongue, Liver, Heart, Lungs, and Stomach,
All in good order

(As might be seen by reference to his doctor, at 150, Brock Street, Grosvenor Square),

To claim his blushing bride.
So cometh love to him who hath the courage
Of speculation and an eye for a bargain!
The ear of the market is difficult to gain,
But it is gainable; and fools are plenty.

"Sublime!" cried the Vandyke gentleman, in a rapture. "What a moral; what practical good sense; what accuracy in the statement of the lover's means, and of his state of health, and of his love—'loved her exceedingly,' you see. Fifty pages of raving couldn't do more to make you

feel his love ; and what beauty in the opening lines—the description of the clearing of the weather, and the very elements conspiring to welcome the man who has conquered the world by means of a candle company. Oh, beautiful—beautiful!"

Jack looked at his neighbour but could detect no signs of irony. He seemed in tremendous earnest, and his remarks having been audible throughout the room, the poet of the future ran across and warmly shook him by the hand.

"Mr. Chillingham," said Lord Windermere, "let me introduce you to Mr. Curlingfield—a very important member of our Club."

Jack bowed, and Mr. Curlingfield did the same, and ran a hand covered with rings through a dishevelled mass of stiff, upstanding hair.

"What do you think of the Eccentrics ?" he asked, in a low tone which showed that this was not to be considered a brilliant remark.

"It seems very—nice," answered Jack, at a loss for an adjective.

"Ah, you should be here some nights ! You should have been here the other day when Professor Dabble gave us his theory of human tails. He distinctly proved that in Ireland, in the twelfth century, the natives considered it a mark of good birth to have your tail curling to the right ; and the Irish patriot, O'Flaherty, who was a guest that night, was so angry about it, that they very nearly came to blows."

"I suppose he didn't like to think his ancestors wore tails," said Jack, smiling, and nearly laughing outright as he met Badsworth's eye.

"Oh no ; but he declared he could prove that the race of kings from which he is descended always curled on the left side, and he means to move for papers on the subject when the Irish Parliament meets again. Then there was the Wednesday before last——"

"That was when you read that capital paper of yours, wasn't it?" asked Windermere; and Jack thought he discerned a semi-closing of one of his lordship's eyes.

"Yes, yes!" and Mr. Curlingfield looked modest, and again raked his hair, "it was rather an interesting subject. I tried to prove, and I think I may venture to say I did prove, that Juliet was not entirely brought up by the nurse; but that, as the position of the Capulets would surely warrant, she had a governess, or perhaps a nursery governess, which Shakespeare doesn't mention, for reasons which I am now giving in an article I am preparing for *The Nineteenth Century*. It will rather upset the commentators, I expect, Mr. Chillingham?"

"It will, indeed," said Jack, gravely.

"It is absurd to think a nurse could have taught Juliet to speak such good blank verse, is it not, Lord Windermere?"

"Perfectly absurd," replied his lordship.

At this moment a burst of laughter, which was alarming after the decorum which had hitherto reigned, made them all turn, and hail the entrance of Mr. Beere as a distinct relief.

"As glum as usual," he said, opening a bottle of soda-water. "Has the spirit moved no one to make a joke yet? Oh, I see what it is! the poet of the future has been at you. No wonder you look depressed, like a set of high-art chairs stuck against a wall covered with sunflowers. Sing a song somebody."

"No, no," said Badsworth; "here's a fellow come on purpose to hear a sermon."

"You're a nice chap to ask one fresh—I might say reeking—from the haunts of fashionable vice to enter upon such a solemn thing as a sermon. Never mind. One can always strive to do good."

And, assuming a comical grave air, he commenced in an unnatural voice, with quavers and desperate shakings at the most telling sentences, as follows:

"Old Mother Hubbard, she went to the cupboard,
To get her poor dog a bone;
But when she got there the cupboard was bare,
And so the poor dog had none.

"These beautiful words, dear friends, carry with them a solemn lesson. I propose this evening to analyze their meaning, and to attempt to apply it, lofty as it may be, to our everyday life.

"Old Mother Hubbard, she went to the cupboard,
To get her poor dog a bone.

"Mother Hubbard, you see, was old. There being no mention of others, we may presume she was alone; a widow—a friendless, old, solitary widow. Yet did she despair? Did she sit down and weep, or read a novel, or wring her hands? No! *she went to the cupboard.* And here observe that she *went* to the cupboard. She did not hop, or skip, or run, or jump, or use any other peripatetic artifice; she solely and merely went to the cupboard.

"We have seen that she was old and lonely, and we now further see that she was poor. For mark, the words are, '*the* cupboard.' Not 'one of the cupboards,' or the 'right-hand cupboard,' or the 'left-hand cupboard,' or the one above, or the one below, or the one under the floor, but just *the* cupboard. The one humble little cupboard the poor widow possessed. And why did she go to the cupboard? Was it to bring forth golden goblets, or glittering precious stones, or costly apparel, or feasts, or any other attributes of wealth? *It was to get her poor dog a bone!* Not only was the widow poor, but her dog, the sole prop of her age, was poor too. We can imagine the scene. The poor dog crouching in the corner, looking wistfully at the solitary cupboard, and the widow going to that cupboard—in hope, in expectation maybe—to open it, although we are not distinctly told that it was not half open or ajar, to open it for that poor dog.

"But when she got there, the cupboard was bare,
And so the poor dog had none."

"'When she got there!' You see, dear brethren, what perseverance is. You see the beauty of persistence in doing right. *She got there.* There were no turnings and twistings, no slippings and slidings, no leaning to the right or faltering to the left. With glorious simplicity we are told, *she got there.*

"And how was her noble effort rewarded?

"'The cupboard was bare!' It was bare! There were to be found neither apples nor oranges, nor cheesecakes nor penny buns, nor gingerbread, nor crackers, nor nuts, nor lucifer-matches. The cupboard was bare. There was but one, only one solitary cupboard in the whole of that cottage, and that one, the sole hope of the widow, the glorious loadstar of the poor dog, was bare! Had there been a leg of mutton, a loin of lamb, a fillet of veal, even an ice from Gunter's, the case would have been different, the incident would have been otherwise. But it was bare, my brethren, bare as a bald head, bare as an infant born without a caul.

"Many of you will probably say, with all the pride of worldly sophistry, 'The widow, no doubt, went out and bought a dog-biscuit.' Ah, no! Far removed from these earthly ideas, these mundane desires, poor Mother Hubbard, the widow whom many thoughtless worldings would despise, in that she only owned one cupboard, perceived—or I might even say saw—at once the relentless logic of the situation; and yielded to it with all the heroism of that nature which had enabled her without deviation to reach the barren cupboard. She did not attempt, like the stiff-necked scoffers of this generation, to war against the inevitable; she did not try, like the so-called men of science, to explain what she did not understand. She did nothing. 'The poor dog had none!' And then at this point our information ceases. But do we not know sufficient? Are we not cognisant of enough?

"Who would dare to pierce the veil that shrouds the ulterior fate of old Mother Hubbard—her poor dog—the

cupboard—or the bone that was not there? Must we imagine her still standing at the open cupboard door, depict to ourselves the dog still drooping his disappointed tail upon the floor, the sought-for bone still remaining somewhere else? Ah, no, my dear brethren, we are not so permitted to attempt to read the future. Suffice it for us to glean from this beautiful story its many lessons; suffice it for us to apply them; to study them as far as in us lies, and bearing in mind the natural frailty of our nature, to avoid being widows; to shun the patronymic of Hubbard, to have, if our means afford it, more than one cupboard in the house, and to keep stores in them all. And, oh! dear friends, keeping in recollection what we have learned this day, let us avoid keeping dogs that are fond of bones. But, brethren, if we do, if fate has ordained that we should do anything of these things, let us then go, as Mother Hubbard did, straight, without curveting or prancing, to our cupboard, empty though it be; let us, like her, accept the inevitable with calm steadfastness; and should we, like her, ever be left with a hungry dog and an empty cupboard, may future chroniclers be able to write also of us in the beautiful words of the text—

"And so the poor dog had none."

"Well," said Jack to Badsworth, as they walked home in the glorious morning, and with some sense of shame met healthy workmen, whose new day of toil had begun before theirs of pleasure had ended, "well, that Eccentrics' Club of yours is the queerest place I ever was in."

"Yes, it's sometimes amusing. Johnny Beere's sermon wasn't bad, he did the whining tone splendidly—and some of the crotchets aired are very funny. Windermere and I belong simply to laugh at it all; and I can assure you that when the Iconoclast begins to break images the fun is fast and furious. The worst of the place is that they are so proud of their conversational powers that no one dares speak above a whisper. They

only have the courage to read their effusions. By-the-bye, your father is a member, and always comes on our ladies' nights, only you mustn't tell her ladyship. Good-night, old chap! Don't forget you and your wife dine with me at Maidenhead to-morrow—or, rather, to-day."

"Did you enjoy yourself?" said Alice, when Jack came in.

"Not a bit. I was longing to be here. You enjoyed your ball though?"

"Yes; everyone was so kind. Oh, Jack," as she sat up in her eagerness, "I am so glad I'm pretty. You know *you* are prejudiced; but I do think I am, after to-night, and——"

"And why should my vain little wife be glad she has cause for vanity?" said he, putting her hair back from her blushing face.

"Because you're more likely to go on caring for me Jack."

CHAPTER IV.

He troubled was—alas, that it mought be—
With tedious brawlings of his parents dear.
SIDNEY'S *Arcadia.*

Such is the luck that some men gets, while they begin to mel.
Gammer Gurton's Needle.

BESIDES that natural antagonism which a deceitful character feels for a frank one, Lady Brocklesby had a specific reason for disliking her second son. Looking upon her chances of life as far better than her husband's—and indeed she was by several years the junior—she had some time before Jack came of age decided that on his attaining that period when the law allows a man to consider himself a man, she would have the entail of a property in Berkshire cut off, and an augmentatien of her jointure, in the shape of a resettlement, effected. To do this required the consent of her husband and both her sons. Lord Brocklesby, saying that it was a matter that affected the latter far more than himself, was inclined to do as they might wish; merely observing that the charges on the property were already far too great, and that the future lord would, even as they now stood, be a poor man.

Spencer, although not at all relishing the diminishment of his income, had joined so heartily in the agitation for the abolition of primogeniture and the law of entail, that he could scarcely refuse; more especially when his mother pointed out how Jack's prospects could be bettered by the arrangement. To every one's astonishment, Jack declined to be a party to the transaction. Her ladyship was furious.

"You calculate on your brother's dying unmarried, and

you are careful not to lose a penny for yourself," she said with a sneer.

"My dear mother, Spencer is only a year older than I am, and I look forward to his marrying before long. Of course I wish your jointure was far larger than it is; but it is as big as the property can stand, and I don't think it would be fair on Spencer, or on whoever had the title, to make the charges bigger. Why, my father says that even now——"

"Your father is very much hurt by your extraordinary conduct."

"No, my dear mother; I think you are mistaken. He quite agrees with me about it; only he was willing to leave it to Spencer and me to decide."

"Well, I must say Spencer has shown you an example of unselfishness; but it has always been the same. I've taken your part and been worried to death by all your follies and extravagances, and now you turn on me and refuse to do what really should be possible without your help. It's the most atrocious piece of ingratitude and cupidity I ever heard of;" and her ladyship's thin lips were pressed together till her mouth looked like a skilfully sewn-up wound.

All this was rather hard on Jack, but, secretly encouraged by his father, who had not had such an opportunity of annoying her ladyship, without danger to himself, for a long time, he stood manfully to his guns, and when he sailed with his regiment to Canada the mother's blessing he carried with him was of a dubious nature. But although Lady Brocklesby was quite ready to do him any harm that she conveniently could, she was equally ready to be proud of, and make much of him, if he achieved distinction, no matter of what kind. She had a respect for prosperity so intense as almost to overcome her malignancy; but woe betide those who incurred her dislike and could not rise beyond her power. *Væ victis!* If Jack were to rob a church, and live prosperously and

unsuspected on the spoil, his mother would have overwhelmed him with attention and flattery, which would have been very nearly real; but of Jack, living on his pay in a marching regiment, and doing his duty to his neighbour in orthodox fashion, she had a most supreme contempt.

His extraordinary marriage had at first, to a certain extent, pleased her. In the first place, it was pretty sure to be a punishment to him; in the second, it was out of the common, and something to talk about. There must have been some gipsy taint in the old FitzCrewe blood, for nearly every generation had produced a rebel to social law; and even Lady Brocklesby, to whom worldly applause and success was as the breath of her nostrils, liked, in the little bit of her heart which had any truth left, a dash of Bohemianism and defiance of custom. She put her wealth and position first, of course, however dull or monotonous they might be; but she respected a penniless gambler or a card-sharper who succeeded, far more than the respectable taxpayer who kept within bounds on five or six hundred a year.

Alice Chillingham she had at once seen was worth making a friend of; she might be a weapon against her son; and in any case the initiation of such a pretty, fresh woman into the mysteries of London life would be amusing; while watching the development of her faculties—and Lady Brocklesby now looked upon her much as we look upon a puppy before its eyes are open—would be a highly interesting psychological study. Beside this, the constant chaperonage of Jane was apt to become a little monotonous; and the visitors to Eaton Square were not so numerous as to make the addition of a few attracted by Alice's *naïve* wit and bright eyes anything but an advantage.

Jack and Alice, however, preferred the liberty of their lodgings in C—— Street to the two upper rooms offered them in Eaton Square; but a compromise was effected

by virtue of which Alice spent most of her time in the Eaton Square drawing-room, and assisted daily at the heavy luncheon.

One morning—they had then been in town about two months, and as yet nothing had been done to find Jack a profession or that mysterious "appointment" of which those who do not want it talk as if it grew on every hedge—one morning he received a note written in the neatest of little Anglo-Greek hands, and bearing the monogram of the Duke of Cheshire :

"Tarporley House, Maida Hill.

"My Dear Jack,

"Come to lunch with me to-day at two sharp. Drive straight up Edgeware Road, and about two miles up. Anyone will direct you to this house.

"Your affectionate Uncle,

"C."

"Oh, the dear old Duke!" said Alice. "He's going to give you something. Let me see. What ought it to be? Lord Chancellor or Lord Chamberlain, or Lord of the Admiralty, or Deputy-lieutenant, or——"

"Stop—stop! you're coming down in the scale too quick. No! I expect he isn't going to give me anything except lunch. And he's so much in love with you, dear, that he ought to stand the betrayed husband as much as that."

"I say, Jack," said Alice, after a pause, during which she had flattened her little nose against the window-pane, and dropped—as she did about fifty times a day—her work, handkerchief, and last-received letters upon the floor, "I say, Jack!"

"Well?" said he, looking up, rather red in the face, after collecting her property from under the table.

"Do you know that I am not sure that I *quite* care about him?"

"Care about whom, most vague of womankind?"

"You mustn't be angry."

"I shall probably do someone an injury. No matter, out with it."

"Well, I declare I think Lord Badsworth is quite detestable sometimes. I thought he liked me at first; but now he's always looking grave; and the other night—at that stupid ball, when we knew so few people—he told me that I was making myself conspicuous. Fancy his daring to say I was conspicuous!"

"But what did he mean?" asked Jack, in a more serious tone.

"Oh, it was something about my dancing so much with Lord Windermere; but as I scarcely knew anyone else, and as he himself wouldn't dance, and you wouldn't, and as I couldn't sit still, what was I to do?" And she turned up her big eyes in half-saucy inquiry.

"I'll tell you what it is, Mrs. Chillingham," said Jack, brushing his hat with his handkerchief, "you're a flirt, and I ought to insist on separate maintenance. It's my belief that while I am at my Club, studying the statistics of the cotton trade, or dipping into 'Locke on the Human Understanding,' as is my custom, like the other members of the Club, of an afternoon, you are holding orgies over your tea. By-the-bye, to be serious for a moment, have you or have you not accepted Windermere's play and supper on Tuesday?"

"No, I'd forgotten; but I'll write now. What shall I say?"

"Oh, say 'Yes.' He's an uncommon good fellow, Windermere, and it's very thoughtful of him, because, of course, he knows that until I get this appointment," and Jack unconsciously assumed an important and official air, "we can't afford many plays. If I see Badsworth, I shall

bring him home to join us in eating our chop to-night, unless you dine at Eaton Square."

"No, I lunch there. But why should we have Lord B.?"

"Pooh, dear!" said he, putting on his hat, and touching her forehead with his lips; "you mustn't quarrel with dear old Baddy. I shall insist on your kissing and making up."

Then, as happy and careless as the swallows that were darting amid the shadows of the old park trees, he started to walk across by the Marble Arch to Tarporley House. The Duke received him very graciously, although his advent caused the interruption of one of the most exciting scenes in the most exciting French novel of the season. His grace, however, although glancing from time to time at the paper book lying neglected on the table, bore his privation very well.

The luncheon was excellent. Only the Duke's secretary joined them, and beyond correcting every statement that his employer made, and staring at Jack in stern wonder whenever he ventured to open his mouth, contributed little to the conversation.

"The weather is going to change," said the Duke; "the glass is falling."

"I beg your grace's pardon, the glass is rising," said the secretary.

"The glass at the M—— Club was falling last night," said Jack.

The secretary looked as if he could crush the last speaker if he liked, but happening to espy a truffle on his plate, he resumed eating, and Jack escaped.

"That speech of L——'s last night in the Lower House must have been very fine," remarked the Duke, as the final glass of sherry was being poured out.

"Dear me, no," said the secretary. "I saw J—— this morning, and he assured me it was poor—quite poor, and that the cheers in the newspapers are imaginary."

"Yes," said the Duke, with a smile, the reporters are very capricious in that respect. I remember——"

"I don't think," put in the secretary, "that, as a rule, they are incorrect. I have a large acquaintance with that branch of journalism, and I think I can safely say they are very seldom incorrect."

"What do you think of my secretary?" asked the Duke, when he and Jack were alone in the smoking-room, and the latter was thinking that he had never known what good tobacco was till he had lit the enormous Claro now in his mouth.

"I think he seems rather——"

"Inclined to contradict? Eh? Yes. I don't think I've made a remark for the two years he's been with me that he hasn't contradicted. He quite comes up to the character I got of him, and is invaluable to me."

Jack looked astonished and the Duke smiled.

"You see, my dear boy, when a man has the luck—good or bad, I scarcely know which—to be what I am, he seldom or never obtains anything from others but grinning acquiescence. If I were to try, I should find a Polonius at every turn who would vow the clouds were weasels or whales or what I pleased; and of course this is pleasant, but, like too much of anything, it is unwholesome. So, meeting that fellow at dinner one night, and leaving the house in a fury with him for what I thought his impertinence, I next morning thought he might be a capital antidote or blue pill to take after a surfeit of flattery. He thinks me an ass, and I believe has the greatest contempt for me, but he has a good head for business, and it's wonderful how much less peevish and dictatorial I have become since he's been with me. But"—and here the Duke glanced at his French novel—"I mustn't keep you all day talking about my affairs. The matter in hand concerns you. I suppose you're hard up?"

"Yes, I am, but——"

"Of course, of course—we won't go into it. I've no

head for figures, and never could form an idea as to what people can live upon. I spend every farthing I have—that is all I know of my own affairs—so you mustn't expect pecuniary help from me."

"I assure you, Duke, I never——" began Jack, colouring.

"Of course you didn't; besides, I don't want to make an enemy of you—such a pretty wife as you have too!—and money transactions between gentlemen always bring ill blood. No, no! But I ought to be able to help you in other ways. I suppose you haven't got any politics?"

"No—not exactly—at least, that is, I haven't any clear ones."

"Of course not—why should you? I doubt if I have any myself. I dislike the Government because they have never given me anything, but I probably should dislike them more if they had, as political work would kill me. The Opposition appear to me to be the worse of the two, although I have no reason particularly to dislike them. Perhaps, on the whole, you'd better be a Radical."

"A Radical!"

"Yes, it would bring you more prominently forward, and it wouldn't prevent your turning into anything you liked afterwards. All clever young men begin as Radicals. Why not begin by writing a pamphlet calling for Yearly Parliaments, Abolition of the House of Lords and of the Church, and Primogeniture, and Fixity of Tenure for English Tenants, and all that sort of thing?"

"But really, Duke," gasped Jack, "I couldn't——"

"Oh, you needn't be afraid of getting any of them. A young politician must begin with some folly, and, as Horace Walpole said, 'one nonsense is as good as another.' I shouldn't be surprised if there is a vacancy at Shodborough before long; and it would be amusing to throw the Government over and bring in a red-hot Radical. Think over what I have said, my dear boy. I fancy I can answer for your getting into Parliament somehow.

Of course I'll pay all expenses; and when there you'll have to shift for yourself. If you play your cards well, and turn round to the winning side at the right moment, you ought to get something before long. My secretary shall let you know directly old Tollebens has determined to retire from Shodborough. The Government are thinking of giving him a baronetcy to go, as he doesn't always vote straight, and believe I shall bring in one of their nominees." And the Duke, after shaking hands with Jack with a gaiety produced by the thought of his projected trick on the Government, turned impetuously to his novel, and was soon revelling in its suggestive indecencies. Jack did not quite see how a seat in the House, *plus* any amount of Radicalism, could add much butter to his bread; but the Duke's wine was so good, and his manner so genial, that his political immorality escaped any severe comment from the young man.

When he reached Eaton Square he was astonished to hear high words in the drawing-room, and, on entering, to find Alice, with her eyes flaming, standing in the middle of the room, angrily addressing his brother Spencer, whose eyeglass was less confident than usual, while Jane shivered in a corner, and Lady Brocklesby, with a smile, went on with her eternal letter-writing.

"You shall not say such dreadful things to me!" cried Alice, with a stamp of her foot.

"My dear Alice," replied Spencer, fixing his glass more firmly, and shifting nervously from one little leg to the other, "I was only telling you the very elementary truths which it is right all should know. There is but one object in marriage—look in your Prayer Book and see—and if that object is deleterious; as it is in many cases, then there should be no marriage. I really cannot understand how a sort of false shyness should be allowed to blind people any longer to the practical view of the contract two people make to live together for the sole——"

"Stop, Spencer!" said Jack, looking rather serious. "Don't let us have any more of this."

"Oh, he's been too dreadful," said Alice, casting a furious look at the eyeglass.

"My dear Jack," put in Spencer, "I was only telling your wife what Malthus, and Bradlaugh, and all writers of any——"

"Confound Malthus and all your infernal nonsense!" cried Jack, angrily, putting his arm round Alice's waist. "What can be the good of your talking to her in this way? and with your sister in the room, too!"

"Oh, I stopped my ears!" cried Jane, from the corner; "I always do when Spencer begins his horrid speeches!"

"But do you really believe——" began Spencer.

"I only believe," answered Jack, "that if you ever dare to talk any of your nasty philosophy before my wife again, she shall not come to this house. I wonder you can allow it, mother."

"My dear," said Lady Brocklesby, from the writing-table, "*I* have no authority here. I don't see how you can expect me to lay myself open to——"

At this moment Lord Brocklesby entered, beaming with pleasure.

"I've got it, Jack—I've got it!" he cried, waving a letter in his hand.

"Got what?" said her ladyship, crossly.

"Why, Jack's future is safe! He's appointed, at my earnest request—by Jove, Jack, it *is* a chance—Secretary to the Association for the Regeneration of Society!"

"What Association?" cried Spencer, starting up.

"It's all arranged," continued his lordship, in intense excitement; "you'll have—oh, I forget what the salary is at first—nothing much, but to increase—to increase as the Association succeeds; and I think I may say"—and he went so far as to look at his wife for applause—"that I have managed the thing pretty well."

"Just ring the bell, please," said Lady Brocklesby, in

an indifferent tone. "The noise you all make gives me the headache. Tell them to post these letters when they come. Remember, Jane, the carriage will be round at five. Good-bye, Alice dear; we expect you to lunch to-morrow," and her ladyship sailed out.

"Do you mean to say," asked Spencer, pale and solemn, "that your society has come to anything?"

"Dear me, yes," answered Lord Brocklesby, smiling. "We have a splendid mission before us."

"And you expect to attain the perfection of the human race?"

"In time—in time, my boy," and his lordship rubbed his hands.

"Bah!" suddenly exclaimed the hope of the family, startling himself by his energy, and dropping his glass. "You're a set of dreamers. Now, there is reality in my plan: the social changes I have sketched out would have ——but no matter. Jack, I wish you joy of your post!" and the Honourable Spencer left the room in great agitation.

"Jack," said Alice, as they walked home, "what does it all mean?"

"It means," answered he, in his emotion, stopping so suddenly as to cause imminent risk of collision with a country clergyman who was close behind, "that your unfortunate husband comes of a family of lunatics."

Alice gave a pretended start of horror, and they walked on; and the clergyman went back next day to his congregation and pointed a terrific moral in his next sermon, by the adornment of a tale of his in his travels having been present when a husband avowed to his wife the hereditary taint of madness that ran in his blood.

"Happy, thoughtless, gaudy creatures," preached he, "going gayly down the Piccadilly of existence! how can *you* tell that the word 'madness' may not sound in your ear at any moment, and the gilded drawing-room be ex-

changed for the howling darkness of an eternal lunatic asylum?"

Neither Farmer Chawbacon, nor Farmer Giles, nor even the Squire's agent *could* tell; so the sermon was very impressive.

When they reached C—— Street, Jack found in his pocket a paper which he remembered his father had thrust into his hand as they parted; and after dinner, when he and Alice were sitting in the little black-hole which the landlady called "the library" (although it boasted but a drunken-looking deal book-shelf hung crooked upon the wall, with three old "Books of Beauty," a volume of "Household Words," and a cheap copy of "Proverbial Philosophy" therein), he lit his pipe and opened this document. It was in Lord Brocklesby's handwriting, and ran thus:

"PLAN FOR THE ENCOURAGEMENT OF FREE TRADE IN VICE.

"To be attained by the Enrolment of a Society Limited (to good Society).

"*Similia similibus curantur.*

"The object of this Society would be to apply a homœopathic method to the great evils which now exist in society, and which all enemies of Communism must deplore as giving a handle to those who stigmatise the upper classes as corrupt. Vice of the sort we mean is a delicate plant which thrives only as long as it is in hot water. Take away the reprobation which it now, to a certain extent, carries with it, you will eradicate its many evils, and by '*supporting* end them.' It has truly been said by many of the opponents of any scheme to restrict the sale of intoxicating drinks that the trade would find its own level if left to itself, and that the abolition of licenses would cause drunkenness to cease.

"In the same spirit we propose, by granting any amount of license, to make vice eventually odious in the eyes even of the most hardened sinners.

"M. Dumas, in Paris, has attempted to inculcate virtue by holding up the mirror to its opposite. The reason of his want of success is that he allows a little of the halo of social disapproval still to linger round immorality.

"What is the pleasure of doing wrong? Its being wrong. If *nothing* is wrong the pleasure will cease. The human is naturally good; therefore all incentives to wickedness being removed, human beings will be good. Q. E. D. Herrick says—

> "He that may sin, sins least; leave to transgress
> Enfeebles much the seeds of wickedness;

and Herrick lived in the reign of Charles the Second.

"The primary objects, therefore, of our Society would be to abolish the boundary mark now set up between vice and virtue; to make it a *sine qua non* for reception into the houses of the associates and their friends, that no scruples on any *moral* point should be retained; and to insist on 'the world's' recanting, for the present, its notions concerning marriage and all the relations of the sexes to each other."

"By Jove!" said Jack, whose pipe had gone out.

"Well," yawned Alice, searching vainly for her high-art needle-work, upon which she was sitting, "what a time it is since you spoke! Say something."

"I'll tell you what"—and he rose and lit their bedroom-candles thoughtfully, while his wife opened her big eyes at his solemn tone—"I'll tell you what—— Look here, Alice, promise me that you will never be a philosopher!"

"Never, Jack!" said Alice, rising to take her candle, and joyfully finding her work; "I'd die first!"

CHAPTER V.

Womankind more joy discovers
Making fools than keeping lovers.

ROCHESTER.

Why, if thou never was't at Court, thou never saw'st good manners; if thou never saw'st good manners, then thy manners must be wicked; and wickedness is sin, and sin is damnation. Thou art in a parlous state, shepherd.

As You Like It.

ALICE had just begun to discover that it is very difficult in London for a husband to be perfectly his wife's companion and confidant, when she met Mrs. Belfort. Mrs. Belfort was so undeniably pretty and popular, that she could afford to be without jealousy of other women's looks, and, whether on the principle of the fox that lost his brush or not it is hard to say, she certainly was always ready to help any young married woman of her acquaintance, to join the ranks of "fastness," of which she was the queen. The gilded youths, who were almost as much at home in her prettily-furnished drawing-room as in their club, sometimes heard of Mr. Belfort; but he was never seen, and was generally looked upon by them as a Mrs. Harris, to be brought out as an excuse when some distasteful project was mooted or a lover's jealousy had to be assuaged. But Mr. Belfort was, however, a reality of flesh and blood; an unfortunate who, not content with spending his honestly and laboriously-acquired wealth on pictures and china, and thus benefiting Art, must needs purchase a pretty girl, young enough to be his daughter, from a country rectory, and cast her, with diamonds and stepping horses, upon the world of London, and with no surer guide for her giddy vanity than his poor, plodding, double-entry self; thereby benefiting neither Nature nor Art. He

struggled at first to make a partnership of the business, but he was too old to learn the ways of society, and at last, like a philosopher, he resigned himself to being only the husband of a flirt, and nothing more. Minna Belfort was no Aspasia, no Phryne, no Lady Audley, no heroine whose heart is granite till the last chapter, when it becomes soft as butter for some totally inadequate reason. She had been intended to be a very good woman, and would have carried out the intention had not one necessary ingredient in her composition been unfortunately overlooked. This was what people call "a moral sense." After some terrible escapade she would look innocently surprised at any blame she incurred, much as a puppy does after knocking down an old Sèvres vase with his tail. She was pretty—how could she help that? She was admired—could she prevent it? She liked admiration—why not? it was her nature. Whatever her deeds might be, she always avowed her intentions to be of the very best, and might have quoted Butler, had she ever read him, to the effect that "to do is less than to be willing." Nature had ordained that she should dance on the brink of a precipice. If she sometimes fell over—well, it was Nature's fault entirely; and as to lookers-on being angry, what business of theirs was it as long as she didn't hurt herself?

"You can't really think me wicked, poor little me?" she said to old Lady Gruffly on one occasion, opening her blue eyes very wide; and even the stern old woman, whose ideas of what women should be were higher than King Arthur's, could not herself say that she did think the pink-and-white child before her was wicked. And the world, which is supposed to be so stern and unforgiving to faults like hers, laughed in a gentle way when a new story came out, and never lifted the knout which had flayed so many lesser offenders. After all, Minna *did* look very pretty playing in the sunshine amid the flowers on the chasm's brink; and when she fell in, it was for her

husband to decide whether she should be picked out and set playing again.

One of the secrets of this forbearance was that she had never said an ill-natured thing, nor had ever felt a pang of that jealousy which is the curse of women of her kind.

If a lover after looking into her eyes for some time began to prefer black to blue ones, she cared nothing. His taste might be correct. If he came back, so much the better. If not, so much the better for someone else. It seemed so natural to her to change her own fancies that such changing in others was no surprise. If any one of the opposite sex remained impervious to her charms, there was no harm done. His was the loss, not hers. She might pity him, and

> Think they want of health or sense
> Who want an inclination,

but she would no more be angry with him than she would

> Take offence
> At him who pleads his passion.

Ignorant enough to make the hair of a School Board to stand on end—for her father was one of those men with *views* about education who always teach their own children nothing—she had to a high degree that power of mimicry or assimilation with her surroundings which is possessed so often by the half-educated. It is sometimes mistaken for tact; and it is the younger brother of this art which is the grease of the wheels of life: but it differs from it insomuch that a connoisseur can always detect a something spurious in the ring of the metal. The hall-mark is well imitated, the taste appears to be perfect, but it *is* only imitation. Luckily the world is not composed of experts. And the eleventh commandment never gave little Minna Belfort any concern whatever. She would have pitied society had she been cast out from it, and would gaily have entered any other that was open to her.

Had she chanced to be the first woman, she would have sweetly ogled the bearer of the flaming sword while passing him in the gateway, and would have charitably concluded that he had an affair on hand elsewhere if he did not relax his frown.

Superficial observers have supposed that the greatest crime a woman can commit in the eye of her sex is to look well, but there is a greater—the arrogation of superiority in sentimentalism. Minna Belfort was a universal favourite with women, who petted her in very much the same spirit as did her male admirers. No one ever dreamt that she attempted to lead captive more than the senses of her temporary victims; their hearts, &c., were left for legitimate and more sentimental flirtations, in which she took no part. A pretty bubble on the sea of existence she was one of those "*personnes si légères et si frivoles qu'elles sont aussi éloignées d'avoir de véritables défauts que des qualités solides*," and to waste more time upon the analysis of her character would be to break a butterfly on a wheel. The attraction she had for Alice Chillingham would be difficult to explain. The difference in their natures had a good deal to do with it, and there was something in the pretty helplessness of the other that appealed to Alice's stronger character. Besides, Mrs. Belfort avowed an intense admiration for Jack, and a determination to subdue him and detach Darby from his Joan if she could, which amused the young wife, strong in the consciousness of safety.

"He is such a difficult dear," said Mrs. Belfort, one day, as Alice sat beside her in the neat victoria Mr. Belfort had lately presented her with, "and always looks at *you* when he might be looking at *me*. Why, he can see you at any time, while me——," and her lips formed themselves into a pretty pout. Alice looked to see whether there was any reality in this complaint.

"You could scarcely expect," she said, smiling "to bring

fire and sword upon our happy hearth all at once. A little time——"

"Oh, my dear, that's no good at all. He'll be taken up by somebody else when he gets more known, and then it will be too late. I do wish I could happen to meet him just after you've had a quarrel!"

"We never quarrel."

"Don't you? Well, I should have thought you would. I thought poor people always did." And she bowed with a bright smile to a passing cavalier.

"Though, after all," she went on, after a pause, during which a little—a very little—twinge of envy of Minna's fine house, fine clothes and fine carriage troubled Alice's mind, "I don't see why you should. My father and mother used to fight terribly over the legs of mutton and grocer's book. But I suppose they were crosser than most people, and they were old, too; and I daresay we shall all get cross when we get old and ugly." And the poor little woman sighed as she glanced into the future and its possibilities. "What *will* one do when one is ugly? It will be too ——But there is Lord Windermere. Let us stop the carriage here for a few minutes. John! John! stop!" They were taking a morning drive in Hyde Park, and the obedient John pulled up his prancing gray ponies under shadow of the trees near Apsley House.

"Lord Windermere," said Mrs. Belfort, solemnly, "Mrs. Chillingham says you are behaving disgracefully to her."

"And in what way have I offended?" said he putting one delicate boot on the step, and leaning gracefully over the carriage.

"I never said anything of the kind," said Alice, rather haughtily.

"Oh!" exclaimed Mrs. Belfort, with a mock astonishment.

"Are you going to the Glormes' to-night?" said Lord Windermere, in a voice which would have suited the imparting of a great secret.

"I don't think I shall," replied Alice, vexed, but at what she did not know.

"Won't Chillingham let you?"

"Jack—I mean Mr. Chillingham—wouldn't dream of preventing me if I wished it?"

"And you don't wish it?"

A beholder of the two would have supposed from his eager manner that the fate of Windermere's whole life lay in the reply he should receive. Mrs. Belfort was engaged in a gay conversation with a young gentleman at the other side of the carriage.

"I don't see what it matters to anyone," said Alice, wishing they could drive on.

"Why, I've scarcely seen you to speak to since Friday, and then——"

"Well?"

"Why, then your friend Badsworth forbade you to dance with me."

"What *do* you mean, Lord Windermere? You know perfectly well that Lord Badsworth has nothing to do with my partners."

"But he wants you not to go to the Glormes' to night."

Alice hesitated, and wished she could get hold of the whip and reins for a moment; but Mrs. Belfort, with averted head, was obstinately continuing her conversation.

"How do you know?" she asked.

"No matter. I generally manage to find out what I want to know. Badsworth is just the sort of fellow who should regulate where a—a pretty woman can go; and the Glormes' house——"

"Lord Badsworth does nothing of the kind!" exclaimed she, her eyes flashing. "I don't understand what makes you think so. But Jack—I mean Mr. Chillingham—doesn't much like——"

"Oh, he only is obeying Badsworth, his oracle."

Alice's hand tightened round the handle of her parasol.

"I daresay I shall go," she said.

"You won't dare," answered he with a meaning smile, putting his good-looking face very near to hers, and causing Badsworth, who happened at that moment to catch sight of the group, to use a strong internal expression.

"Dare!" and Alice laughed, but not the pleasant laugh that was usual to her; "I shall certainly go." And as she said this, she returned with a studiously careless nod the half-sad, half-reproachful glance which accompanied Badsworth's bow.

The prejudice against the Glormes' house was one very inexplicable to all properly-constituted minds. Of course, everyone knew that for many years their county had obstinately refused to receive them, and that the doors of all but the most careless were in London closed to them; but then had not the times changed? There was Social Progress, as well as Disestablishment of Churches, or Despoiling of Landlords, to the front; and the old landmarks are worthless now.

Sir John Glorme's character was no doubt made up of many hues—generally dark ones—but, as we know, "all colours are blended well by gold;" and when he came into his fortune the shame which had overshadowed him while hanging on the very outskirts of society vanished into thin air.

It is true that at his house assignations were made; but then they were great ones who made them; and if the Duke of This happened always to dine on the same night as Mrs. That (Mr. That being curiously absent, perhaps dining with the Duchess of This), who had a right to complain?

It is true that at his house no woman with an atom of womanly feeling would allow her daughter to be seen; but did not this give all the more room for the young matrons to tread measures upon the slippery *parquet*?

It is true that his house was beyond doubt or cavil disreputable; but as it is equally true that it was fashionable, it mattered not a jot.

Windermere was quite right in saying that Badsworth had advised Jack not to take his wife there. Jack had foolishly let Alice know of this advice. Is not the result obvious? Alice insisted on going. Nevertheless, had she not, in the midst of her irritation at finding that Windermere knew the truth about it, met Badsworth's frown, the chances are, she would have spent a quiet evening at their lodgings with Jack, and contented herself with regrets over the list in *The Morning Post* next day. And so the first quarrel came about.

"You're quite mistaken if you think I am going to arrange my conduct according to Lord Badsworth's whims."

"And you're quite mistaken," said Jack, hotly, "if you think it's only Badsworth, and not myself too, who objects to this."

"I detest Lord Badsworth!" she cried, rather inconsequently.

"All wives do detest their husband's friends, I believe," said Jack, trying hard to be sarcastic.

"I don't know, and I don't care, about other people's wives; but I do know one thing——"

"Nonsense!" and he kept up his sarcastic tone. "And what may that be?"

"That I shall go to this ball."

"Alice dear," and Jack became serious, and forgot the ironical *rôle*, "it would hurt me if——"

"You mean it would hurt your particular friend. There's nothing wrong about the ball. Everyone's going! Minna Belfort told me——"

"Minna Belfort is——"

"Well, what is she? I suppose you know she is my friend?"

"Never mind what she is. Thank God you are not like her!"

"Your mother says I ought to go."

"My dear Alice, you married me, not my mother, and

I must insist——" But what he was about to insist upon will never be known, for at this moment the door was thrown open by the maid-of-all-work, and Lady Brocklesby, smiling, and congratulating herself that she had certainly heard high words, entered the room.

She did not look her best, for she and Alice were about to proceed in broad daylight, arrayed in evening costume, to pay their respects to their sovereign ; and perhaps, after the age of forty, a low gown in the daytime is trying. Her manner, however, was charming, and never did a mother-in-law express more admiration than she over her pretty daughter.

Jack in his Court suit felt ridiculous and stiff; while Alice, angry with herself for quarrelling with him, and therefore much more angry with him, determined to gain herself an ally in the conflict.

"Only fancy," she said, when the details of her costume had been sufficiently inspected, "Jack says I mayn't go to the Glormes' ball."

"Not go to the Glormes'! Why, it would be a great pity to miss it. The amount of fury which I've heard of in consequence of the limited number of invitations is tremendous."

"I don't think they're respectable," said Jack, bluntly.

"My dear Jack," and her ladyship's lips grew very thin, "I scarcely see who constituted you the judge of others. People of far higher position and as good character as you, I *hope*, go there. Of course you can prevent your wife going, if you please, but it certainly seems to me rather a selfish proceeding, and very childish."

"It's neither selfish nor childish," said Jack, conscious that dignity in a Court dress is impossible. "I simply don't choose Alice to go among a set of married women who are——"

"I think, Alice dear," interrupted Lady Brocklesby, with gentle and acidulated firmness, "we had better go now. It's a good thing to be early and not miss Her

Majesty. If you're coming, Jack, I really must ask you not to say anything coarse; it upsets my nerves, and I am sure Lord Brocklesby gives me quite enough of that sort of thing."

And Jack, thoroughly snubbed, as much by his wife's sulky silence as his mother's words, made himself as small as he could, and entered the family coach.

Perhaps there is nothing more trying to a man's temper than to stand about for a couple of hours in a strange costume, with a sword stuck through his tails, among a crowd of women who wonder what he does there. At any rate, by the time the ceremony was over, and C—— Street reached, he was thoroughly out of humour, and the sun set upon a very respectable quarrel between our young couple.

CHAPTER VI.

Alas for love! The honey that he brings
Leaves bitterness: the arrows that he speeds
Return upon him with avenging stings.
He thinks to wound, and 'tis himself who bleeds.

FREDERICK TENNYSON.

"MY dear Alice," said Lady Brocklesby, as, with Jane on the front seat, they drove to the Glorme ball, "you need not put yourself out at all about Jack. His wishing you to stay away from this ball was only a whim, and now he is quite pleased to go to his club. Besides, my dear," and her ladyship's thin, battered, berouged face looked almost fiendish in its attempts to be arch, "you can't expect a young husband always to be at his wife's elbow."

"I don't see why not," said Alice, looking gloomily at her pretty white arm, and wondering why her companion must talk. "If Jack was at all——"

Lady Brocklesby waited for the remainder of the sentence, but it was inaudible, as a heap of the rocks which a beneficent vestry puts down for the benefit of the horse-dealers was then encountered by the carriage-wheels; and Alice was not inclined to raise her voice for the purpose of abusing Jack, angry with him as she was.

"No, my dear," said her ladyship, when they got off the stones, "Jack is naturally like other young men; indeed he must be worse."

"Worse?"

"Yes; because you see he has never had anything of this kind before. London was a sealed book to him till now; and of course you must expect——"

"What?" said Alice rather faintly, as the other paused.

"Only a few of the natural indiscretions of his age.

He was always a good boy, was Jack, but *very—terribly* —fond of amusing himself in a way which a silly wife would object to, but which you——"

"Oh, mamma," cried Jane, in her excitement forgetting the awe she felt for her mother, "that stupid Timmins has given me two left-handed gloves! What *shall* I do?"

"You really are too annoying, Jane," said her ladyship, angrily.

"But it wasn't my fault, mamma!" and poor Jane nearly burst into tears. "It was that idiot Timmins!"

"I've got two pair," said Alice, and was only too glad to assist in coaxing Jane's rather plump fingers into one of them, and thus to escape any more conversation about Jack's propensities.

The ball, as far as she was concerned, was a failure. Angry with herself, she was, naturally enough, angry with everyone else; the floor was sticky, the music was bad, her partners danced ill—in fact all was out of tune. Lord Windermere seemed to wear an air of triumph, too, which annoyed her especially, and she could have boxed his ears when, putting on his most winning smile and bending his curly fair locks towards her, he thanked her for coming to the ball.

"It isn't your ball, Lord Windermere," she said, in a defiant tone, which caused Mrs. Belfort, who was close by, to laugh and whisper to her partner.

"No; but I may be glad you have come—after all the difficulty, too."

Alice turned away to someone else, but was painfully aware of the smile of amused superiority with which Lord Windermere had received her snub.

Sir John Glorme was insufferable to her, too. A satyr in evening dress, he leered and paid compliments which would have made her laugh had they not made her blush. He ostentatiously *armed* her about the room, and standing close by, he gave out her name and his opinion of her

beauty, as if she had been a picture he had just purchased at Christie's.

"Splendid, isn't she? Just what I like. Not a bit too small and yet not one of your d——d big women. Not fat, and yet plump enough for a Turk. No; she's not a widow—worse luck; she's got a husband, but" (with a wink) "he isn't here. Every dog has his day, eh, Keyser, my boy?"

Mr. Keyser assents with a languid smile, and asks her —politely ignoring her fury—to dance.

"Some dogs ought to be drowned as puppies, and never have any day," she says angrily, as they cross the room in search of tea and respite from Sir John's half-drunken admiration.

"Ah!" said Keyser, gazing into vacancy and seeking ideas there, "ah!—yes, he is a boor; but then, you see, Mrs. Chillingham, there must be some such in the world. Depend upon it that the unpleasant things of life are—are—very disagreeable."

"That's very true," said Alice, smiling.

"You think so? Yes, very true," and he sighed an enormous sigh. "I have often thought—but, shall we sit down? You don't care about dancing, I suppose? I have often thought that the world would be a very sad one without its griefs."

Alice glanced at him with some respect, for the remark sounded clever.

"How?" she said.

"Well, I've studied human nature pretty deeply, and that's my conclusion. Depend upon it, we are all very foolish. Now, look at this ball. Here we are, a number of more or less intelligent people, collected together to do nothing except jump about——"

"So you really won't give me one dance?" interrupted Lord Windermere, looking very humble.

"Will you take me to the conservatory?" said Alice to Mr. Keyser; "it's so hot here, and——"

"Not one dance?" repeated Lord Windermere standing in her way, and taking no notice whatever of Mr. Keyser.

"I said I would not before," and Mr. Keyser was astonished at the firmness with which the little hand upon his arm impelled him towards the door.

"But you don't go so far in these days as to mean what you say?" asked Lord Windermere following them.

"Lovers' quarrels," whispered Mrs. Belfort as she whisked by.

"What o'clock is it, Mr. Keyser?" said Alice.

"I have no watch; time is an exploded idea now. Depend upon it, Mrs. Chillingham——"

"Lord Windermere," said Alice, turning round in exasperation, "what o'clock is it?"

"Eleven."

"And my carriage isn't ordered till twelve. Mr. Keyser, will you take me downstairs, and then get me a cab?"

Mr. Keyser looked at his dapper boots, and as he took her downstairs mentally enumerated the various puddles he might have to encounter before he could reach a cabstand.

"Good God! you're not going away?" exclaimed Sir John Glorme, who met them in the hall as he was returning from a last inspection of the supper table; but Alice escaped into the cloakroom.

Poor child! she was suffering agonies of remorse for her disobedience to Jack, whom she pictured to herself sitting in the little sitting-room alone and unhappy.

"I've never been anywhere without him before," she thought; and she also imagined that the manner of the men to her that night was different to when her natural protector had been present.

With her shawl on, she brushed past some new arrivals, and stood out in the street; but there was no cab or sign of a cab. The absurdity of her position struck her forcibly, and she could have laughed had she not felt more

inclined to cry. It was not very tragical certainly. Only a young married woman who had gone to a ball against the wish of her husband, and determining to go home, had anticipated the arrival of her carriage. Yet it is doubtful whether small griefs, when the heart is soft and foolish, are not worse than great ones in the more sensible and more joyless years.

A voice at her elbow—a pleasant and respectful voice said, "Well, Mrs. Chillingham, I don't suppose you mean to walk home. Will you take my brougham? I won't charge any fare."

"Oh, Lord Windermere, you're very kind! but I thought I should be able to get a cab. Mr. Keyser——"

"Keyser, poor fellow, is moralizing over women's caprices, and the ulterior destiny of thin shoes, half a mile off at this moment. You'd better have the brougham."

"But are you sure it's no inconvenience?"

"Not a bit. I never meant to stay here long, as I have to go to another place; so I kept it." And Alice found herself walking down the pavement with her hand on his arm.

"Home, I suppose?" he said, as he shut the door of the little brougham. "Oh, bye-the-bye, could you drop me at Boodle's? It's not a yard out of your way."

"No! no! no!" she cried, in an agony. "No, thanks; please tell him to go to C—— Street," and she pulled up the window, and nearly took off the tip of Lord Windermere's well-shaped nose.

Sorrow for Jack's loneliness and her ill-treatment of him was a little interfered with during her rapid drive by the natural curiosity which compelled her to examine all the little conveniences and inventions which coach-builders exhaust their ingenuity upon when building miniature broughams for rich bachelors. Scent bottles, pockets for letters, a flask-case, brushes, looking-glasses, receptacles for cigars, cigarettes, and ashes, almost blunted

the pang of mournful pleasure with which she hurried back repentant to the embrace of her lonely husband; but when the carriage stopped, and she was admitted by the sleepy maid, all the feelings that had spoiled her ball returned in full force, and she dashed impetuously upstairs. All was darkness. With some difficulty Alice found the match-box, and, having lighted all the candles she could find—for one of the angelic *traits* in women is a fondness for light, if not sweetness—searched for Jack in such a way as to suggest that he was in the habit of hiding himself behind the curtains or under the bed. The search being fruitless, she sat down in what the lady who was kind enough to accept five guineas a week for the rooms called, in bitter irony, an easy-chair, and took up the first book at hand. It was the last fashionable novel from the practised pen of a great man—in fact, the greatest man of the day. Opening it at random, and listening anxiously for the glad sound of Jack's latch-key in the door, she read as follows:

"Vavasour sat, clad in a morning costume of one of those gauzy substances that seem to carry our imagination to the luxurious atmosphere of the fair East, and pondered; his hands (covered with rings wherein sparkled jewels that would have shamed the Koh-i-noor) before his face. Outside the ebony door, with its crystal handles and golden panels, treading softly to and fro, on carpets from the looms of sunny Persia, were the two butlers, conversing now and then, when in their peregrinations they met them, with the six grooms of the chambers; behind whom, radiant in brilliant uniforms of gold and sky-blue, with their silk stockings flashing in the tempered light of the sun streaming through the Venetian glass windows, might have been observed a group of five-and-twenty stalwart and respectful footmen. These were not the whole of Vavasour's servants, as may well be imagined, but the remainder were engaged in the multifarious duties of the princely establishment. The

head butler entered the apartment and approached his master with noiseless tread.

"'Your lordship will see the tailor? Your lordship made an appointment with him.'

"Vavasour looked round carelessly, letting fall on the table-cloth of finest linen, which was honoured by bearing on its silver sheen his brilliant breakfast equipage, a hand shaming even that in colour by its dazzling whiteness.

"'Yes; let Mr. Rule be admitted to my presence.'

"'Your lordship would honour me with some commands,' said Mr. Rule, approaching Vavasour's chair, bearing in his hand the measuring implements of his calling.

"'Yes,' said Vavasour, starting as from a reverie. 'Let me have a hundred coats, a thousand pairs of pantaloons, and a hundred and fifty waistcoats. Place as many precious stones in the waistcoats as you can. Let them be everything that money can command and good taste allow.'

"'The price will be fourteen thousand pounds,' murmured Mr. Rule, reverently withdrawing.

"'My steward will give you a cheque,' said Vavasour, sinking again into a reverie."

Alice yawned, opened the window, and looked out. No sign of Jack. Again at random she turned over the leaves of the interesting work in her hand.

"There was a ball at the Duchess's. The ladies Mignonette and Endosphryne sparkled in gem-set grounds, that paled even their splendour when the lovely eyelids were raised, and floods of outlook from the flashing orbs burst forth. The Duke, having just returned from an audience with Her Majesty, at Balmoral, was well and happy. Tamarind, the artist, who spoke seventy-two languages, and held that the nose and not the mouth was intended for the organ of speech, chatted amiably in the domestic circle: which circle he boasted he could always 'square.'

Suddenly the Lady Mignonette approached, with a tear trembling on her beauteous cheek, ready to fall on the equally beauteous *parquet* floor.

"'What is the matter, Mignonette?' said the Duchess.

"'I have been grossly insulted!' replied the patrician beauty, with streaming eyes.

"'By whom?' and the blue blood of the Duchess mantled on her brow.

"'I have been spoken to by a commoner.'

"There was a breathless silence, a fearful pause, and no one can tell what the result of this communication might have been, had not Vavasour at that moment approached and claimed Lady Mignonette's fair hand in the approaching valse.

"'Are you fond of waistcoats?' asked he, when they reposed after the first wild whirl.

"'I have seen so few. Are *you?*'

"'Oh, Lady Mignonette,' and Vavasour sighed, 'I have made so many mistakes. The world is a riddle.'

"His partner looked up at him when he gave vent to this withering sarcasm, and blushed.

"'Cannot you guess riddles?' she said, timidly.

"'Oh, no!' said Vavasour, 'for I make mistakes. I am so rich, and yet I make so many mistakes. The world is very flat, Lady Mignonette.'

"'My dear Mignonette,' said the Duchess of Carabbas, approaching them, 'the Duke of Grandblessington and the Prince Tortonibullico are dying to be presented to you. May I have the pleasure?'

"Vavasour turned away and bit his lips; then sauntering through the scented saloons to one still more odoriferous, he coquetted daintily with a truffled ortolan."

Alice threw down the book impatiently. Was Jack never coming home? Visions of midnight murders, of garrote robberies, of all the dark possibilities of which she had ever heard or read, rose before her. One o'clock! Was there ever such a wretched wife as she?

The fashionable beauties of "Vavasour" having failed to divert her attention from her melancholy situation, she, after craning out of the window again and seeing nothing but the policeman, took up another book that lay upon the table, and determined to forget Jack, the ball she ought not to have gone to, and all her miseries, in its perusal. The volume opened where Jack—with supreme indifference to what the authorities of the circulating library might say—had turned down half of three or four pages to mark a favourite passage.

"The rain came down drip, drip upon our two bare curly heads. I saw a slug crawl over the toe of my not very sound boot, and a big pearly drop run slowly down my lover's nose, and made him look like one of those faces on the top of Milan Cathedral—gurgoyles, I think they are. I speak first.

"'Ned!'

"'Well. Nice and dry, isn't it?'

"I burrow my head inside his waistcoat, so that he may not see my burning blushes.

"'Do you know what a gurgoyle is?'

"'Is it anything to eat?'

"'You dear old stupid!' I exclaim, my voice muffled in consequence of my position. 'I don't think you know anything.'

"'Yes, I do—by Jove, yes!'

"'And what's that?' and I come out of my retreat for a moment and look up at him.

"'That you've the biggest, sweetest eyes that ever drove a poor fellow to distraction!'

"The plash, plash of the rain made a soft musical accompaniment to the music that Ned and I unconsciously are performing in our own hearts. Our lips met, and remained together—it seemed an eternity of happiness. Oh, my splendid Ned!—my grand, ugly, honest Hercules!

"'Don't! don't! don't!' I cry at length, and he holds

me at arm's length and looks into my eyes with a sudden fierceness.

"'Have you ever kissed a man before?' he says, gnawing a large piece off his tawny moustache.

"'You hurt my arms,' I cry, half-angry, half-pleased to see the splendour in his eyes when they are fierce.

"'Poor little arms!'—and I am clasped close in his embrace again—'but have you?'

"'Never!' I say, emphatically, in his ear, hoping he will not see the blush which the recollection of my little flirtations with A——, and B——, and C—— and my engagement to D——, calls up.

"There is a pause, and I feel a cold drop of rain making a promenade down the small of my back. I shiver. Three or four rather improper quotations from the Bible come into my head; a parody of a Welsh hymn echoes in my brain; and all the time the relentless rain falls upon our two heads, so close together and so heedless of it. Involuntarily I put one of my white arms round Ned's neck—that stately column of brown flesh—and pouting my red lips towards his till the damp moustache touches them, I say in a shy whisper:

"'Kiss me again, Ned!'"

Strange to say, even this refined and delicate love scene was scarcely sufficient to keep Alice's thoughts from her absent husband. She put down the book with a sigh, and determined to think. Being a woman she naturally thought of herself, and in a minor degree of others in their relations to herself. But the thinking experiment did not succeed; as, to her horror, she found Lord Windermere's half-sleepy, half-insolent face intruding into her thoughts. Lord Windermere! It was curious that she should think of him, for she detested him; at least, she felt that detestation was the proper state of feeling which every decent young woman should be in as regards his lordship. And then the clock struck two, and a new policeman, with boots that creaked more horribly than

his predecessor's, came on the beat; and Alice's brain was clouded over with the mists of drowsiness; her pretty head fell back against the preposterous crétonne of the arm-chair; one innocent white hand hung down, having dropped the volume in which sweet tales full of passion and delicacy were told; and—low be it spoken in the ears of those followers of Byron who cannot see a woman eat—Alice sent through the open window a gentle snore to mingle with the music of the morning breeze, as it played for a moment scornfully amid the chimneys ere speeding away to the "green woods and pastures," which are "new" and beautiful at each rising of the sun.

CHAPTER VII.

There are who lord it o'er their fellow-men
With most prevailing tinsel; who unpen
Their baaing vanities to browse away
The comfortable green and juicy hay
From human pastures.

Endymion.

We have said that luncheon in Eaton Square was always a function of some importance, but on this sweltering afternoon of July there was an extra solemnity in the whole business, and the stout butler beat the gong with the air of a drum-major.

"Good God, my lady!" says Lord Brocklesby, walking impatiently up and down the drawing-room, "are we ever to get our luncheon? I really don't think we need wait for Flittery."

"Mr. Garter is coming," said her ladyship, impressively, glancing at her eldest daughter, who blushed, and looked out of the window, while Jane patted her affectionately on the hand.

"Oh, Garter's coming, is he?" and his lordship grunted. "I'd have ordered a second joint if I'd known."

"I am sure, papa," exclaimed Jane, still patting her sister's hand, "Mr. Garter doesn't eat any more than other people; and remember all the work he does."

Emily lifted her gray eyes to the ceiling, and appeared to derive consolation from the whitewash which our British taste delights in. She was one of those women to whom martyrdom is almost as much a necessity as matrimony, and who will make the former for themselves despite any amount of contradiction, being unfortunately, unable to manufacture the latter state of existence. But her martyrdom, which consisted principally in the painful

effort to be martyrized, was nearly at an end. The golden gates of which she had often, with unconscious incredulity, spoken to old men and women, about to find all out for themselves, were passed by her or nearly so; and now that she had reached them they turned out not to be the vague dream of a disappointed woman, playing at sanctimonious utility while she longed for worldly uselessness, but the actual portals into a splendid harbour of domestic felicity in this world, which even she—the despised by the worldlings—could reach and pass through.

The Reverend Theophilus Garter, Rector of St. Banbury's, in the West End, and prime institutor of a genteel Protestant style of confession, was a prize worthy of a greater fisherwoman than Emily Chillingham. To begin with, his living, aided by many gifts which such an ascetic nature as his naturally drew forth, made him a well-to-do man. He was caressed by many great ones, and knew as many family secrets as there are in all the tin boxes of Lincoln's Inn Fields. He was young—about forty-five—with a splendid mass of naturally curling and glossy brown hair, which formed what the most enthusiastic of his lady district visitors called an *aureole* round his intellectual head; his figure was neat, his dress perfect, his gloves soilless as his soul, his boots all that there could be of most unparsonic, his hat curled at the brim, his flower fresh every morning from Solomon's, his voice sweet as Patti's when it wooed the doubting, stern as Mr. Gladstone's when it warned the defiant; his gait important, without a tendency to waddle, and gay, with no *soupçon* of swagger; his address that of Chesterfield and D'Orsay rolled into one; and his morals for himself as strict as his morality for others was broad, benevolent, and forgiving.

That he should cast his eyes on Emily was a surprise to her as well as to several hundred other virgins of demure age; and it would be uncharitable to suggest that a small income of £1000 a year over and above her younger child's fortune, left her by a defunct spinster

aunt, could have had anything to do with Mr. Garter's choice.

As yet he had only spoken with definiteness to Lady Brocklesby, and there was only a tacit understanding that this afternoon was to witness the glad enunciation of "Yes," which was already leaping in anticipation out of the delighted Emily's mouth.

"Confound it! I shall go down!" said his lordship. "Unpunctuality is all very well in common people, but in parsons it is inexcusable. Ain't they always telling us to remember how time flies, and how we must prepare for our latter end? If I'm right in my theory that Paradise will be what each man likes best, dear me! what an enormous larder Garter will possess when he goes over to the majority!"

"I don't believe," said Spencer, "that, supposing for a moment that the theory of an after existence is true——"

"Oh, Spencer!" from Emily.

"That there is any notion yet put afloat by the wildest of visionaries which supposes us to take our stomachs out of the world with us."

"My dear boy," said Lord Brocklesby, who was always awed by his elder son's eyeglass, "you mistake me. I did not mean that Garter would actually swallow mutton-chops in the other world, but that he would perpetually dream he was doing so—do so in his soul, which of course I know is all that he can take with him. And talking of that reminds me that we have fish to-day for lunch—it's Friday, you know, Emily, and his reverence fasts on the fish before he feasts on the meat—and it's getting cold. I know a man—you may have known him, Spencer; no, by-the-bye, you weren't born—but he was a capital fellow; only cared about eating. Stay, was that him? yes, or else it was another man in the same regiment. Well, you needn't yawn so, Jane."

"I wasn't yawning, papa."

"Weren't you? Well then, you were imitating the

hippopotamus when he expects a bun, and very like it was. Well, this fellow that I've told you all about was so annoyed once at having to wait for dinner, and knowing that the soup was spoilt—it was Bisque, I fancy—that he had an indigestion, and died of it that night. At least I fancy he died; I know I never heard any more of him."

"Dear me, my lord," said Lady Brocklesby, looking in the glass, and wishing she had put on just one touch more rouge, "you are quite overwhelming with your recollections. Mrs. Nickleby was nothing to you in the way of connected narrative. By-the-bye has anyone seen Alice or Jack lately?"

At this moment Mr. Flittery was announced, and immediately afterwards Mr. Garter, and they proceeded downstairs in the shy, disconnected manner in which English people always do any social act for which hard-and-fast rules are not laid down.

Of course the Rev. Theophilus sat by Emily, who, in a seventh heaven of delight, listened to the remarks he found time to make between his mouthfuls.

"I am too shocked," says her ladyship, the servants having retired, "and I cannot believe it. Surely, Mr. Flittery——"

"Oh, my dear Lady Brocklesby——!"

"You can speak out here; we are all relatives except you," and she smiled in a beneficent fashion on the perspiring rector.

"Well, it is certainly true," said Flittery.

"That she left that ball with him in his brougham? I did miss her very suddenly, but I never dreamed of this."

"Who—who—who?" cried his lordship, who was engaged in eating a hot plover's egg out of an egg-cup, his last gastronomic freak.

"Why, Alice," said his wife, in very clear and distinct accents. "I am afraid she has committed an imprudence."

"Pooh, pooh!" said his lordship. "The world is peopled by imprudences. I am sure there'd be no marriages without, except, of course——" And catching the four reproachful eyes of his eldest daughter and the clergyman he faltered.

"I am very sorry to hear this," said Mr. Garter, slowly, as if his words had to force themselves through the luncheon he had just eaten. "She appeared to me to be a pretty creature, and I had hopes of awakening her before long to a sense of what she might do for the souls of others."

"At present she is only concerned to wear out her own soles valsing," said Lord Brocklesby. "But why shouldn't she take a lift from Windermere? I suppose her carriage hadn't come."

"You understand nothing about it," said her ladyship, crossly. "I only hope it will never come out. Of course, my dear Mr. Flittery, you——"

"Oh, *I* never talk! One naturally comes across many odd things in one's life in London, but I am always silent as the grave about them; and in the case of such a charming person as your daughter-in-law, I need scarcely say——"

"As far as I care, you can say what you like," cried Lord Brocklesby, getting rather red. "I'm not afraid of my little Alice ever doing anything that won't bear daylight. By Jove!" and here he poured out his third glass of sherry, "I remember such a pretty girl that came out in '43, and they got up stories about her, and I said I would vouch for her good name with my life, just as I would for little Alice," and he smiled pleasantly.

"And what became of the young lady?" asked Spencer, cruelly, knowing his father's idiosyncrasy.

"Became of her? Oh, poor thing! I forgot that—she ran away two months after marriage with a courier, or something of that kind; but I never followed her history up."

"It is indeed sad," said Mr. Garter, "when one thinks

how many people are cast away through not meeting at the critical moment with some one who can say a word of comfort to them. Lady Clementina Greyswill, with whom I visited one of our districts this morning, tells me that the wonderful effects of the few words she has at different times said to that little Mrs. Belfort, for instance, have done wonders."

"On the principle of setting a thief to catch a thief, I suppose," said Spencer. "Poor Lady Clementina avoided her ultimate destiny of sanctity as long as she possibly could, and it was only when that last wig of hers was an egregious failure that she turned to the arms of Holy Church, which doesn't object to paint if piety be put on as well."

"I think that is rather uncharitable," said the parson, with as near approach to ill-humour as he ever showed. "Dear Lady Clementina brings great experience to her glorious campaign against wickedness in high places. As a woman of the world she can speak on equal terms with women of the world; and if some of the vices she reproves have been committed by her, does not that fit her peculiarly for showing their emptiness and insufficiency?"

Emily looked at her neighbour with pride, and Spencer, warned by vigorous kicks under the table from his father, gave up the argument.

In a short time the clergyman and Emily were alone together in the drawing-room; the remainder of the family, having, on various pretences, strayed away.

Emily, feeling very red and uncomfortable, sat on the edge of her chair and tried to recall instances of courtship in the religious romances she sometimes read.

The Reverend Theophilus smoothed his tie, brushed up his curling hair with one white ringed hand, coughed as he was wont to do while inspecting his fashionable congregation before the sermon, and, leaning over the back of Emily's chair, thus began: "Dear Miss Chillingham. Very dear sister in the Lord. It has often crossed my

mind that I should thank you for your cordial co-operation with me in our humble efforts for the regeneration of others; for your comprehending my meaning so well when often it seemed doubtful to the crowd. Miss Chillingham —Emily—may I call you Emily?"

"Oh yes!" And she trembled till the thin gilt-legged chair creaked under her.

"Emily as my sister you have done great things for our cause; you have, although born in the purple, and capable of enjoying in society all the admiration and excitement your station and beauty would bring you"—Emily clasped her hands with grateful delight—"you have chosen the good part; you have preferred to labour with me for the sake of the souls of others. It seems to me, Emily—dear Emily"—and here he took her willing hand and swayed it about as he spoke, much in the manner of one negligently playing with a dog's tail, looking meanwhile in the glass at his comely features, and wondering whether Lord Brocklesby's interest would go as high as a bishopric—"that there is a position for which you are eminently fitted, and which your lady mother has no objection to your entering upon. I mean that of my wife."

Emily gave a long sigh; it was the happiest moment of her existence. Shall we grudge it her? shall we laugh at her poor withered affections, wasted on this lump of affectation and hypocrisy? Surely not. As long as her eyes are not opened, and he remains upon the pedestal where she has mentally placed him, she will be happy; and if her narrow notions of religion do no good to others, still they are credited by herself, and are not, therefore, altogether fruitless.

Meanwhile the conversation in the back drawing-room turned upon Alice's adventure after the Glormes' ball, as related by Mr. Flittery.

"I always knew it would be so," said Lady Brocklesby. "He knew nothing of her before marriage; and these

American girls have *such* freedom given them! And Lord Windermere too! Certainly the most dangerous man in London. Poor Jack! my poor boy!"

"Ah!" said Mr. Flittery, sighing too. "It is sad! And he has no suspicion! A charming fellow—charming! So fresh and unsophisticated! But, Lady Brocklesby, *how* ignorant of the ways of London!"

"I think," said she, after a pause, during which Mr. Flittery twisted his little black moustache with loving tenderness, "I think it will be better to say nothing about this sad affair as yet. It may mean nothing, and I wouldn't have my poor boy's domestic happiness ruined by doubt before it is unavoidable. I may depend upon you?"

"My dear lady," and Mr. Flittery rose and smote his breast, "you know that *I*, at least, am not given to scandal."

And in twenty-four hours half society was talking of Lord Windermere's new victim.

CHAPTER VIII.

Love is maintained by wealth : when all is spent,
Adversity then breeds the discontent.

HERRICK.

A FORTNIGHT has elapsed since the unfortunate Glorme ball caused the first disagreement of any seriousness that had occurred between our young couple. Perhaps Jack would have mollified more easily to his wife's earnest expression of repentance when he came home and found her sleeping by the open window, had it not been that she was abetted in her rebellion against his authority by Lady Brocklesby, and that Lady Brocklesby—whom he mistrusted, despite the fifth commandment—knew all about their quarrel, and its termination in the utter rout of the husband.

Besides this, while Alice was waiting repentantly for his coming in, he had been assisting several young gentlemen of the Household Brigade to get through an evening, and the extra glass or two which he had perforce swallowed that night took the wrong turn, and produced crossness instead of geniality. Certainly Jack was decidedly ill-tempered at breakfast next morning, and refused to be moved by the red eyes and inflamed nose opposite.

They had now moved into what the agent called "a bijou residence" in North Street, Park Lane, and after a week's practice had managed to perfect themselves in the feat of turning round in the drawing-room without knocking anything down. And they had begun to experience the horrors incident on a young couple, ignorant of everything connected with domestic economy, trying to keep house and entertain their friends on £500 a year. Jack's was not the recklessness of a spendthrift, but that of ig-

norance. He had an almost Micawber-like belief in the "something" which would surely "turn up," and his mother, who had helped them to set up their establishment, had rather fostered this idea, the argument in her mind being, "If I can bring him into pecuniary trouble he will be glad to consent to the entail being cut off for the sake of a sum down," Alice, naturally enough, had no notions on the subject of money whatever. Her natural shrewdness, however, often told her that they were going too fast but Jack always assumed so business-like an air, and so patronisingly soothed her when she remonstrated on the number of "little dinners" and casual luncheons they gave their friends, that she—believing him to know most things—was easily quieted for the moment. Nevertheless when she saw people continually waiting in their little hall, and noticed that after the weekly visit their cook paid to Jack's sanctum with "the books," his face was gloomy and his manner tinged with a dash of bitterness and railing at the fortunate ones of the earth, she could not feel quite at her ease.

"My dear Alice," Jack said to her one day, "if we live in London at all, we must live more or less like other people. Of course I economise as much as I can, though Perkins is infernally fond of stock meat; and as to there being extravagance in my asking fellows in to lunch or dinner, that's all nonsense, What's enough for two is enough for three, or for four either."

"I think that's false reasoning," said she, gently.

"Well, all I can say is, the weeks we have no one the books are just as big. It appears Goggles eats as much as most aldermen, according to Perkins, by-the-bye." Goggles was Alice's pug, a very king of pugs, fat as the historian Gibbon, ugly as Wilkes the patriot, ill-tempered as Xantippe, who made a philosopher.

"Poor Goggles! but seriously, dear——"

"Seriously, Alice, it's a waste of time to talk about it. By-the-way, Windermere dines here to-night."

"He dines here very often."

"Yes; and he declares Perkins cooks admirably. I am sure she ought to, considering what I have to pay." And Jack sauntered off to smoke a pipe downstairs.

Lord Windermere had managed to establish himself thoroughly as *ami de la maison*; and was so useful to Jack that it never occurred to that young and credulous gentleman there could be any stronger motive in his constant visits than a wish to enjoy the company and conversation of Mr. Jack Chillingham. Lord Windermere's manner with men was as perfect as with women. The frank aspect with which he listened to their opinions, and humbly subordinated his own; his genial smile and shake of the hand on meeting; his careless *bonhommie* and intense appreciation of jokes, no matter how old or bad, combined with his singularly attractive face, secured him almost as many friends as he had acquaintances; and even those sensitive husbands or pretty wives, who formed the class against whom he had declared war to the knife, felt that they were matched against a worthy foe, to be defeated by whom was almost itself honourable.

It was only now and then that a flash of hard worldliness betrayed—in a careless moment—the cynical, cruel nature of the real man; although in cases when he thought such an assumption desirable, he could subdue some darkly romantic French-novel-reading dame with a blatant atheism and misanthropy which even De Musset could scarcely have done justice to.

That Alice was certainly the prettiest new beauty in town that season was quite reason enough for him to wear her colours; but he had soon found another reason in the indifference with which she received his homage, and he would now have been very seriously annoyed had any accident prevented him from still basking in the light of her smiles. And she did smile upon him. Perceiving the mistake he had made at first, he now addressed her with the most respectful and formal courtesy; and Alice felt grateful to him for the many amusements he discovered

for them, and for the friendship he evinced towards Jack, whose circle of friends in London widened but slowly.

It is sad how true the lines from Herrick prefixed to this chapter are. Love may exist comfortably in a cottage, no doubt, but it must be a cottage whose chimneys do not smoke, a cottage with modern drainage, windows that will open and shut, and a pleasant neighbourhood. Love and worry will not abide together; and poverty, especially that form of it called "genteel," which has to sacrifice half of its little all for appearance's sake, means worry. Worry leads to loss of temper, loss of temper to hard words, which although soon forgiven are in most cases never quite forgotten. And the use of hard words one day makes it certain that they will recur another day, another, and another; until Love, who exists only upon sympathies and dulcet tones, spreads his wings and betakes himself to where people are rich enough to bill and coo, and drink champagne, and keep their tempers.

Neither Jack nor Alice was exactly aware of it, but each little disagreement they had over their domestic difficulties was another nail in the coffin of their young romance. He had on one occasion told her she was "worse than useless," and after retorting that he was "horribly unkind," she had wept bitterly over the remark.

A week later she smiled at the recollection of her exaggerated grief at so small a thing, for *now* he had actually said, "It was a pity they had ever married!" It is true that at the time this terrible observation was made Jack was in a state bordering on frenzy, caused by the discovery that their rate of living exceeded their income by treble its whole amount, not counting anything except what they placed in their mouths—an emotion that was excusable when, in addition to this, all their servants had just given warning in consequence of being denied a hot supper. Yet it had set Alice wondering, going back to what we may call first principles, and speculating—the most dangerous of speculations for a young wife—on what might have happened

if that part of her existence which embraced matrimony had been differently planned.

Badsworth, who worshipped the ground on which Alice's high heels rested, and who was furious at scraps of tea-table gossip, connecting her name with Lord Windermere's, which he sometimes heard, attempted to warn her that her innocence of evil was taken by "the world" for a taste for it.

"Do you mean," said she, sternly, her eyes looking very stern, and her hands tightly clenched together, "do you mean that *you* think so, Lord Badsworth?"

"No, no," he cried hastily, wishing the floor would swallow him. "I only mean that people are horribly ill-natured, particularly when the thing is about any pretty woman who is not—I mean whom they didn't know—that is, who——"

"You mean who is not quite one of themselves. And so Jack and I are not to be permitted to choose our own friends?"

Alice tried to speak in a dignified tone, but her voice shook a little with anger, and the look in her eyes would have alarmed a bolder man than Badsworth.

"For God's sake, Mrs. Chillingham, don't misunderstand me. Of course I know perfectly well how causeless most stories one hears in London are; but as your friend, I——" Her lip curled, and he went on desperately. "Well, as Jack's friend, who would like to be yours, it does drive me mad to hear people daring to talk."

"Don't you think, as Jack's friend"—and there was a cruel emphasis on the phrase—"you should speak to Jack? I can assure you I shall take no orders as to changing my friends from anyone except him. Of course, as Jack's friend you have a right to say what you like to him; but I scarcely think the position carries also with it the right to insult me." Her bitterness was probably in part due to a dim consciousness that Badsworth had

not spoken entirely without reason. We always deny more indignantly the crimes we have nearly committed than those of which we are wholly innocent."

Badsworth gave a groan, and, seizing his hat, fled from the storm he had evoked; and had the satisfaction of running against Lord Windermere's button-hole flower on the staircase, as the latter ascended.

"If ever I interfere in that way again," he said to himself, as he walked down Park Lane, "may I be——but it is too bad of Jack to be so infernally green. And as to speaking to him—no, quite impossible.

If Badsworth truly supposed that his anxiety was altogether, or even principally, caused by his early friendship with Jack, and not at all by the impression Jack's wife's beauty had produced upon him, he must have possessed a remarkable genius for self-deceit. But some very truthful and very religious people do possess such genius, even to the point of believing they are charitable when mentally consigning their friends to the pains of hell fire.

* * * * * *

Autumn approached, and the Demon of Change took possession of the souls of those persons who condescend to call themselves "Society."

The butcher who supplied No. 12, North Street, Park Lane, had agreed to wait a few months for his money; sufficient funds had been discovered to satisfy the demands of the parting servants; and the banker's book was considerably on the wrong side, when Jack received the following letter:

"Dear Mr. Chillingham,

"The Duke of Cheshire desires me to inform you that by the retirement (to be announced immediately) of

Mr. Tollebens, the seat at Shodborough will be vacant in a very short time. His grace thinks that you should at once proceed there and place yourself in the hands of the local agent. If you will call on Mr. Horton, in High Street, you will receive all assistance from him. It is entirely due to his zeal and sagacity that Mr. Tollebens came in at the last election. I am further to tell you that the Duke wishes to defray the whole expense of the election, whether contested or not.

"I remain yrs. faithfully,

"GEORGE SEYMOUR SMYTH,

"(Priv. Secretary to the Duke of Cheshire)."

"It's a curious thing," said Jack, after some expressions of gratitude to the Duke, "that he never hints what my politics are to be."

"Write and ask him," put in Alice, with a flash of thoroughly feminine common sense. The Duke's answer, however, scarcely gave the aspirant for senatorial fame much information.

"You can be," the Duke said, "Tory and stupid and safe; or Liberal and mediocre and hesitating; or Radical and clever and ruinous. An honest Liberal-Conservative would be a fine animal. But fine things in politics are impossible. Mob rule is the worst of tyrannies, and we approach nearer to it every day; not by accident, but on purpose, simply because the kind of ruin is popular, and popularity means place. On the other hand, standing still is bad; and any setting up of classes of human beings over other classes is utterly indefensible. I sometimes think a duke with wealth and castles is the most ridiculous object the sun can shine on, except, of course, an anointed king. Yet the 'Majesty of the People' is a myth. It is—as you can see by what I say—out of the

question for me to give you advice. Only recollect that *principles* are necessary in politics, but what they are matters very little. Shodborough shall vote for you, or I will know the reason why.

"Your affec. Uncle,

"C.

"Give my love to your wife. I hope her bright eyes are not dimmed by our London smoke."

Perhaps it is a fact worthy of noticing that when Lord Windermere heard of Jack's approaching departure in search of political glory, he at once telegraphed to the master of his yacht at Cowes that his cruise was postponed; a change of plan with which, in that paradise of sham sailors, the old skipper was not likely to quarrel.

CHAPTER IX.

La fortune et l'humeur gouvernent le monde.

LA ROCHEFOUCAULD.

"MADAME,

"I take it of bad part that you have not sent me a cheque for my bill, for I have large moneys to pay to other peoples, and what can I if I am not paid by my clients? I suffer in having to say that if I do not receive my due before a week I shall be forced to bring before M. your husband my claim, and to tell M. Chillingham that I am about to request my advocate to gain it for me.

"I am, Madame,

"Your humble servitor,

"LOUISE DE BRÉBAUT-GRANDCOURS."

This missive, written in small characters, ornamented with magnificent spidery flourishes, was received by Alice some half hour after Jack had left for Shodborough; and Jack's last words had been a desponding hope that they might not be in St. George's Workhouse before long. It was certainly very terrible; and besides this magnificently-named maker of exquisite *confections*, compared with which Worth's best work was devoid of poetry, there were many other tradesmen who had, now the season was well nigh over, been displaying an uncomfortable curiosity to see, as they themselves would have put it, the colour of Chillingham's money. Visions of Jack's arrest just as he returned victorious from Shod

borough rose in Alice's mind; and she pictured to herself the agony of a whole nation at seeing the future orator, the budding Prime Minister, at the very outset of his career, led, manacled and guarded, to the gloomy seclusion of a debtor's gaol. Alice was not well versed in the Bankruptcy Laws, but she had a dim consciousness that at that moment they owed more than they could pay, and that they were therefore to some extent dishonest, and therefore to some extent deserving of actual punishment. She had not yet been acquainted long enough with genteel poverty to know that there is nothing derogatory in attempting to cheat a tradesman by taking his goods and paying for them in promises only. And what made the discovery of all she owed on her own account still worse was, that Jack had always insisted on deluding himself into the belief that he had a wife who was superior to other men's wives in the matter of economy in dress, and boasted so loudly that she, spending nothing, could look better than other women who ruined their husbands in milliners' bills, that Alice never had the heart to disabuse him; and though, perhaps, she had in her pocket a stern demand from her bootmaker, or an outcry of indignant protest from her glover, preserved a guilty silence, and allowed Jack still to "lay the flattering unction to his soul" that a woman can dress well and spend little.

And now there seemed a very conspiracy of their tradesmen suddenly to demand their money. Just at a time, too, when money was even scarcer than usual in North Street, and when it would be terrible for Jack either to have his victory embittered, or his defeat made doubly sad, by a disclosure of the crisis. What was to be done? She looked at her banker's book (Jack had insisted on her having a separate account for the small sum she called her pin-money; for, as she remarked, "Then you see, dear, I can't possibly leave the firm altogether penniless. Women are always afraid of writing

cheques." Alas! the figures were on the wrong side, and it was only a few days ago since her attention had been politely called to this fact.

It never struck her that the relentless milliner would have gladly lent the money to pay her own bill, or that there were genteel little doors off the Strand, with three unobtrusive, almost aristocratic balls above them, where jewels, lace, and many other things can be deposited, and a consideration received from a gentlemanly person who takes charge of them. No vulgar "popping," or pawning, or receiving of *tickets;* quite a commercial transaction. But, then, she was as yet a novice in the art of saving appearances on nothing a year. All she did know was that something uncommonly like ruin seemed already to have come upon them, and that if she could save Jack a pang at any cost, she would; for had not his romantic love for her been the cause of all? Women are the true philosophers where money is concerned. They solely value it for what it brings, and rarely—except in isolated cases of old maids who keep starving cats and omit to wash—love it for its own sake, as many men do. In real life as well as in novels women face ruin better than men; it is only afterwards, when the man has braced himself to bear the inevitable, that the woman begins to kick against the consequences of the ruin she had so boldly defied, and which in the abstract she had not feared. It is Lombard Street to a China orange that she then makes these consequences worse to herself and to all about her; for the capabilities of feminine repining are inexhaustible. They were male dogs that licked the sores of Lazarus; female dogs would have scratched them.

In these days of energy, lawn-tennis, roller-skating, and bear-fighting in high places, women have lost some of their old and well-established luxuries; and one of these is that piece of consolatory refreshment, "a good cry." A fair lady jilted would be much more likely now-a-days to throw a sofa-cushion or a loaf of bread at the faithless one, or to accidentally topple him over on the sham ice, than

to retire to her bedroom, let down her back hair and weep as in the good old days. Yet the "good cry" was no doubt a very great comfort, surpassing in its pick-me-up qualities even the glass of disguised alcohol with which modern doctors soothe the nerves of great ladies living on excitement. Alice, regardless of being behind the age, and recking nothing of red eyes, laid her head upon the terrible letter from Mme. de Brébaut-Grandcours, and wept bitterly; and at that moment Lord Windermere was announced.

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Chillingham; I——"

"Oh, never mind," and she tried to smile, and hoped she did not look "an object." "You know women are always allowed to make fools of themselves sometimes, and —and Jack's just gone to Shodborough."

"Yes; but only for a week or so; and to come back a great man, licensed to make laws for us. I wonder whether he could be persuaded to bring in a bill to make women speak the truth."

"Why, Lord Windermere, don't you believe me?"

"Believe that you were crying, and trying to spoil those lovely eyes, because Jack has gone away for a week? No."

"Then its very rude of you," and Alice attempted to be angry; but his kind tone was pleasant to her, and she dreaded being left alone to think of Mme. de Brébaut-Grandcours and St. George's Workhouse.

"Something in that letter has given you pain?"

"No;" and she crumpled it up nervously. "At least —but it doesn't much matter."

"Doesn't it? Well, for my part, I can't see what the use of friendship is if one hides one's troubles from one's friends. Now, if I were in trouble, I should tell you at once, Mrs. Chillingham, though I daresay you'd be bored."

"No, I shouldn't, *really*."

"You see, I—it may be impertinent, but I don't mean it so—I've taken a very great liking for you—and Jack: I feel sure that he would tell me if he got into any row.

"I'm not in any row," said she, smiling.

"Well, something has gone wrong anyhow. Have those precious relations of yours been doing anything?"

"Oh no! but you musn't cross-examine me like this. I suppose you think a woman never can keep a secret."

"I'll tell you what," said Lord Windermere, after a pause, during which he had never taken his eyes off her blushing face; "I know what it is. It's money. Don't be offended. Jack told me he was hard up. You were crying about money."

"Somebody says that's the only thing worth crying for in this world," she said, evasivly.

"Yes, of course. Bills, banker's book over-drawn of course; and here you are fretting your poor little self over it all, while I—— Do you know, Mrs. Chillingham, the injustice in this world is terrible," and he jumped up, and marched up and down the room.

"How do you mean?" she asked surprised, by his vehemence.

"Why, there are you and Jack—you the prettiest, nicest woman in Christendom, and he the best fellow, worried to death about money matters; and here am I, a selfish, useless animal, with such a heap lying at my banker's that I can't spend it. I've just been taking my cheque-book round to pay a lot of things, and it's filthy to think that I can't actually spend enough, while you——" He stopped close to the table where she sat. "Look here, Mrs. Chillingham, its ridiculous your being worried about such things. Let me lend you enough to stop your bothers."

"Oh no, Lord Windermere, it wouldn't be right at all. Jack——"

"It would only be lending it to Jack really; only you see he has this election in hand just now, and it would be a pity to worry him about milliners' bills, wouldn't it? Besides, perhaps he doesn't think you owe quite as much as you do."

Involuntarily Alice glanced at the dunning letter which lay upon the table.

Lord Windermere seized it. "Yes, just as I thought," he cried, impulsively. "Well, you know, Jack wouldn't be pleased to see this."

"No," faltered she, feeling that it was no use to pretend to be dignified under these circumstances.

"Then why ever let him be troubled by it, or any of the others? For, of course, there are others."

"Really, Lord Windermere——"

"Oh, my dear Mrs. Chillingham, you really must not be offended. If *you* won't allow me the privilege of a friend, I know Jack would—only why not save him annoyance just now by permitting me to pay all these things, and, of course, you—that is, he—can repay me at any time?"

The woman who hesitates is lost, they say. Alice hesitated. She—unlike Mrs. Belfort—was blessed or cursed with a moral sense, and she felt that to accept money from a young man was not strictly right. Still she did not believe it to be very wrong; and, no doubt, as Lord Windermere said, it would really be as much a loan to her husband as to her. And then the pain and bitterness it would save her and Jack! Of course it *would* be paid back; and to Lord Windermore the temporary loss of a small sum mattered nothing. Would it not be unfriendly to refuse? Yet, was friendship between a man and a woman possible? Alice believed it was, and came from a country which has proved that it is so—that is, where the blood flows slowly, and the soul is taken up with dollar-making. And as she hesitated, Lord Windermere wrote a cheque for £1000, and laid it on the table.

"Don't let us say another word about it," said he. "When Jack leads the Radicals to victory, and takes away all our property, I shall probably come to you for a great deal more; and,"—here for one moment he abandoned his respectful, almost business-like manner as he took her hand—"dear Mrs. Chillingham, I would give my whole fortune to obtain for you a moment's pleasure."

And he was gone, leaving Alice with his cheque and a kiss his lips had dared to press upon her hand.

CHAPTER X.

Rem facias, rem! Si possis, recte : si non, quocunque modo, rem!
HORACE.

ALICE'S first impulse was to tear up the cheque and give orders that Lord Windermere should never again be admitted. That her hand should have been kissed was not so very terrible, for pretty women cannot always stand on tiptoe of virtue when they value adequately their prettiness and its advantages; but that £1000 should lie on her table as it were paid for that hand-kiss seemed shocking.

And yet was it, after all so shocking? Good heavens! A young married woman taking money from her—friend? Yes, surely he was her friend and nothing else; and Jack's friend, too. And it was to save Jack from trouble that he did this. Of course, it was possible for ill-natured people to say ill-natured things, but if she in her own heart knew there was no harm, there *was* no harm. "Dear me," said she to herself, "I wish I had been at Oxford and learnt logic." As far as she knew, this £1000 would clear off all they owed. Yet—what a nuisance Lord Windermere was, giving it to her instead of to Jack, though, perhaps, Jack's exaggerated sense of independence would have made him reject it. But surely, then, if he would have refused it, it must be wrong for her behind his back to accept. She seized a pen.

"DEAR LORD WINDERMERE,

"I return your cheque, which I could not think of accepting, and I am astonished——"

No! that would not do; for if she had been astonished she would have shown her astonishment before Lord Windermere went. One thousand pounds! It was a large sum; and *how* delicious it would be, when Jack came back, to feel that there would be no money trouble, crisis, or discoveries! If Lord Windermere were only twenty years older! Yet, surely, it was absurd to care about such folly as what spiteful people might say. If she did accept this loan—at this point she took up the cheque and unfolded it—at any rate, Jack must know at once. She had a dim perception that Lord Windermere would be pleased if she had a secret from her husband, and nothing was farther from her mind than to gratify him. But if it would be a gratification, did not that fact alone prove decisively that she should not take this money?

Again Alice took up her pen.

"DEAR LORD WINDERMERE,

"I return you the cheque which you were kind enough to offer to lend Jack and me; because I think that, if anything of the sort were done, it should be through my husband, who understands about money matters. Very many thanks all the same for your great kindness."

Certainly a stupid letter; yet how could she explain herself better? It should certainly go; and the envelope was nearly directed when Mrs. Belfort was shown in.

Mrs. Belfort was one of those who are so entirely ignorant of deep feeling that they cause in lookers-on not so blessed by Nature a feeling of shame at the absurd reality of life to themselves, while this pink-and-white doll unconsciously and without effort attained what no pagan philosopher ever could quite honestly acquire. She simply took life exactly as it came, and would no

more have complained at a freak of Fortune than she would have assaulted her ticket because the train was behind time. We have heard of laughing philosophers, and of many other sorts, but the philosophy of ignorance is the only kind that is quite perfect.

"I am in despair," she said, sitting down on the sofa, and looking a picture of smug prosperity. "Quite in despair, dear."

"And why, Minna?"

"Charlie's left me; gone after Mrs. Delmar."

"Charlie? Mr. Belfort?"

"Oh no! By-the-bye, it *is* a coincidence. He's Charlie, too. Oh no! I mean Charlie Wildair. He was my *especial* last season, and I meant it to have gone on for another. Isn't it dreadful?"

"My dear Minna"—and Alice looked very grave—"you know I hate your talking like this, and I believe you only do it to annoy me. You don't really mean the dreadful things you say."

"Oh yes, I do! Charlie really is *desperately* taken by Kate Delmar. But, after all, perhaps I shall get over it, though he certainly is the best-looking boy to be seen anywhere now. Almost better-looking than Windy—eh, Alice?" and Mrs. Belfort's big blue eyes rested maliciously on Alice's face.

"I don't think Lord Windermere particularly good-looking," said Alice, demurely.

"Oh!"

"He is very agreeable—sometimes."

"Oh!"

"And very fond of Jack."

"Oh!"

"Why do you go on saying 'Oh!' like that, Minna?"

"Did I? But, I *say*, Alice, you've been crying. What a pity! Tom Babbles declares every time a woman cries she loses so much of the size of her eyes—decimal something or other he called it. I haven't cried"—and she

pondered gravely for a moment—"not since my old man would make the honeymoon a fortnight instead of a week. And it *was* aggravating, for Charlie Wildair was desperately in love with me then, and who could tell what a fortnight's absence might do? And after all my trouble and anxiety, here is Charlie gone after all! Do you like my frock, dear?"

"It's lovely," said Alice, abstractedly. "Do you know, Minna, I want to ask you a serious question."

"People are always wanting to ask me serious questions. But they are generally men."

"How do all the women who are poor, and whom one sees in different gowns every day, and with carriages and things, manage it?"

"What a funny question!" said Mrs. Belfort, glancing round the little drawing-room, which Jack in a fit of extravagance, had furnished in the highest of what we are now pleased to call high art.

"Well, but how do they?"

"Why, people give them things, I suppose," said Mrs. Belfort, carelessly.

"What sort of people—relations?"

"Relations, dear! Who ever heard of relations giving anything? No. What's the use of women being pretty if they can't get things given them? Why, though my old man is very good to me, and scarcely ever grumbles at what I spend, I find occasional presents very useful. Poor dear Charlie Wildair—I *am* so sorry to lose him—nearly ruined himself last year giving me things. Indeed, I believe that house at Ascot—which my old man was so cross about, that I had to declare I'd leave him if he didn't apologise—must have cost Charlie his year's income."

"And you took that from Captain Wildair?"

"Of course I did. I shouldn't have gone to Ascot else; and I had the loveliest frocks—one, I remember, was blue, with——"

"I think you were very wrong," said Alice, rather indignantly.

"Oh no! Everyone does it; and there's something so pleasant about having things given one like that, that I don't know why the fact of having a rich husband should prevent one taking them—sometimes."

"Does everyone really do it?"

"Of course they do. Why, you know as well as I do that there are at least a dozen women going about now whose husbands *couldn't* pay for their dress, let alone all their other expenses."

"It's very dreadful," said Alice.

"Dreadful! Why, dear, I suppose rich men, particularly rich bachelors, were made for the purpose; and it's quite the regular thing now. Nobody minds."

"Of course I can understand," said Alice, slowly, "a woman accepting a loan from a friend——"

"Of course! That's what it is—they're only loans from friends. Why, Emily Greenell told me the other day that her husband always expected Lord Courtall to pay the coal and beer bills for each season."

"What! that boy?"

"Oh, he comes of age next year; and he can get anything from the Jews, they say."

"Look here, Minna," and Alice stood up in her agitation. "Supposing I told you that Lord Windermere had—finding out by accident that my bills for dress and things were rather troublesome—had offered to lend me enough to pay them—only a loan of course—and I'm to tell Jack?"

"I should say that Lord Windermere was only doing what he ought," said Mrs. Belfort, smiling; and I shouldn't trouble Mr. Chillingham about it, if I were you. Husbands and wives often see a thing in different lights."

"But there's only one light in which anyone could see this."

"Well, my dear, all I can say is, those poor ponies will

be grilled if they stand any longer in the sun. Men never know when they're well off; and if I were you I wouldn't give my husband an opportunity of refusing a piece of luck. Lord Windermere is enormously rich."

"But to have a secret from Jack!" said Alice, half to herself.

"Oh, I've heaps of secrets from my old man, though I'm tremendously fond of him. He certainly gives me much more than anyone else, except compliments, and I *do* like being told I am pretty."

"Do you? I hate it!" Alice's tone was decidedly cross. It had certainly been a mistake to try and obtain advice from this frivolous little woman; but, nevertheless, the matter-of-course way in which she had taken what was to Alice an announcement of great importance had its effect; and, when Mrs. Belfort's high-stepping ponies had rattled out of North Street, Alice tore up her note to Lord Windermere and placed the cheque in a drawer, so that she might still further think over the course she would pursue.

So Mme. de Brébaut-Grandcours and the others got their money, and Alice, half in innocence, but only half, put her little foot on the path downwards.

Lord Windermere, when twelve hours had elapsed and the cheque had not been returned, crowned himself in anticipation with victorious laurels, and had he known as much of Milton as of women, would doubtless have exclaimed—

> If this fail,
> The pillared firmament is rottenness,
> And earth's base built on stubble.

CHAPTER XI.

What is a wise man?
Well, sir, as times go, 'tis a man who knows himself to be a fool and hides the fact from his neighbour.

Old Play.

When Jack called at his club on the way to the railway station, he found there a telegram from Mr. Horton, of Shodborough, saying that things were not quite ripe for his advent, and that he had better defer coming for another two days. Nothing loth, he returned in a swift hansom to North Street, and was received by his wife with as much effusion as if he had been through a campaign, or been engaged for a winter in attempting to reach the North Pole without lime-juice.

Failing to obtain any political directions from the Duke, and his own mind being in a chaotic state with respect to party cries and ambition, he determined to take counsel of his friends before going to Shodborough. His friends however, although willing enough, were not very capable in this respect. Johnny Beere being consulted first, suggested "Down with heverything" as a fine Radical motto; but on Jack humbly observing that he thought that a little strong, the professed "funny man" advised him to take "Speed the plough, and down with machinery and free trade!" for a war-cry.

But this wouldn't quite do.

"Look here, Jack"—Mr. Beere called everyone by his christian-name after an hour's acquaintance—"I'll tell you what we'll do. We'll have a dinner—a regular thoughtful dinner. I'll ask some of the biggest thinkers in London, and we will thresh the subject out. I'm really serious, old chap. I'm not always a fool. I've read Mill

on Liberty, and the 'Mill on the Floss,' and all sorts of Mills, which 'grind exceeding small' in the season here, by-the-bye. 'No mattar,' as they say in melodrama. Why don't they call it apple, or nut, or ginger-beer drama? as *melos*—the Latin, you know, for melons—are seldom sold at transpontine theatres. The Venus of Melos—misspelt Milo sometimes—lost her arms from disease brought on by eating too many melons. Did you ever read 'Fausse Alerte,' in 'Monsieur, Madame, et Bébé?' Some French archæologists swear that, like the parvenu-loved Heralds' College people, they have found Venus's arms, but I don't believe it. But I am wandering from the subject, as Queen Elizabeth said when she ran away from Lord Essex, after boxing his ears, or might have said. Never mind, we will return, as the Czar won't say when he takes Constantinople. We will have a thoughtful dinner. I read a book—first-class—the other day, in which the host was elevated (you never can make a joke before a Roman Catholic) by his idea of having bills of talk as well as bills of fare. That's what *we'll* have. I'll ask the people, and we can all pay our share, and you shall stand or sit at my right hand and keep the thing going with me. Eh?"

"I don't quite see," began Jack, bewildered by the other's flow of talk.

"Of course not. You now see through a glass (that sherry and bitters) darkly; but after such a dinner as I will order, we shall see everything face to face. We'll dine at—ah! at the Aquarium! There's something fishy about a political candidate which suggests it; and you can't be offended, as whatever you do there'll be plenty of tanks—I mean thanks—with nothing in 'em. To morrow night—eight o'clock. Are you game?"

"Of course; though I ought to go to Shodborough by the last train that night. But who will draw up the conversation *menu*?"

"I will, and I'll make everyone swear to observe it.

By gad! how intellectual we will be! I say, old chap, rub up your first principles, and all that sort of thing, will you?"

"But what have they got to do with politics?"

"Oh, I don't know; but they might come in, and a fellow like you, with a pretty wife and a duke for an uncle, and a conscience, as I'm told you have, ought to know all about first principles. But of course I shall bring in politics about cheese-time. 'The word poltik,' as Count Smorltork said, 'surprises in himself,' and there's nothing like surprise to aid digestion. We'll have politics all dessert-time, and go on with it as long as you like; and we shall have a capital opportunity of comparing the gifted 'Zazel' on the wire to a politician. I can hear Keyser moralising about it already."

"The cannon would be the confidence of his party, I suppose?"

"And the net she falls so softly upon the outside mob, always ready to hold up a fallen minister."

"And which he, like Zazel, only makes use of as a means to get back to the cannon."

"Well, look here, Jack," said Johnny Beere, as he sauntered towards a group in another part of the room, "eight o'clock sharp—wits sharp, I mean."

"Not going to Shodborough till the day after to-morrow?" said Alice, when she heard of this dinner-party. "I thought you were in such a hurry?"

"So I was, dear," said Jack; "but you see one day can't make much difference, and though of course this business is mostly fun, still I may gather something from it. I've got to write my address," and Jack looked rather ruefully at the foolscap, as yet unsoiled, which he had purchased for his mighty effort.

"Let me write it," said Alice, bringing her husband a light for his cigar. They were in the "den," or library, of North Street, after dining out.

"Write away."

"You're a Tory, of course?"

"Anything you like."

"Well, let me see. 'Gentlemen——,' You always call them gentlemen, don't you?"

"Always," said Jack, lazily enjoying the first whiffs of a cigar which represented a day's income.

"'Gentlemen,'" went on Alice, sitting at the writing-table with an important air, and reading her words slowly as she wrote them, "'if you elect me for Parliament you will be doing a great good to England, and pleasing your landlord very much.'"

"That's an argument *ad hominem*," said Jack, with the superior air that the quotation of Latin before a woman gives a man.

"I daresay it is, replied Alice, inking her fingers in perplexity; "but I don't quite know how to go on."

"You must say which side I'm on."

"But how can I say so when I don't know?"

"That's just my difficulty."

"Oh, I know. 'In consequence of the great difficulty in taking a decided line in the unparal——' Where do the two ll's come, Jack?"

"First two," said Jack, sleepily.

"'Unparalleled difficulty of the present situation, I shall be——' Are you listening?"

"Yes, darling," and Jack waved his cigar in proof of being awake.

"'I shall be——' No, 'I am,' that's much better—'I am only prepared to tell you that whatever question may come before me as your representative, I shall most certainly take the side which is right.' I don't see how anything could be better than that."

"No," said he, rising and putting his arm round her waist as he leaned over the table. "But they would want to know what I thought right."

"Surely they might leave that to you," cried she, rather indignantly. "What can a lot of butchers, and bakers,

and people know about it? They must leave you to settle that."

"I wish they would—when I've found out for myself."

"I'll always tell you what *I* think," said Alice, with a pretty saucy air of wisdom.

"You!"

"Yes, sir. I'm not so ignorant as you think. I've had pamphlets sent me; pamphlets about the Turks, and massacres, and vivisection, and the Contagious Dis——"

"Did you read them all?" cried Jack, starting.

"No-o; but I mean to. I had a lot about the contagious thing—something to do with cattle, poor ill-used things, isn't it?"

"I vote we go to bed," said Jack, throwing away the end of his cigar.

"But you'll let me help you with the address, dear, when I've read all my pamphlets?"

"Heaven forbid!" said Jack, kissing her. "Don't you bother your little head about politics—at least till I'm in Parliament."

"Ah, Jack!" said she, putting her white arm round his neck, and turning her great eyes up to his, "I *long* for it to come right. Then I shall go every night to the House, and how proud I shall feel when you make the speech of the season, and everybody says when they see me, 'That's the wife of Mr. Chillingham, the great orator!'"

"You foolish little woman!" said Jack, pinching her ear. Do you know what a seat in the House means? As far as I can make out, it means sitting in a bad atmosphere, listening to bad speeches, while every now and then you try vainly, like a bad fisherman, to catch the Speaker's eye."

"You silly boy!" said Alice, "you know perfectly well that you will make a great success. At any rate I know it."

"I only know you look too pretty to-night."

"And you are not going to dine at home to morrow, our last night? You haven't ever been away yet. I wish you weren't going at all!"

"And how about Shodborough?"

"I hate Shodborough! Why can't they elect you without all this trouble? Send your photograph and the address."

"If I sent yours it might do more good," said Jack, as he followed her up the narrow staircase.

"*How* glad I am that he won't have Mme. de Brébaut-Grandcour's bill to bother him!" thought Alice as—

> Her gentle limbs did she undress,
> And lay down in her lovliness.

CHAPTER XII.

Others apart sat on a hill retired,
In thoughts more elevate, and reasoned high--
* * * * * *
And found no end, in wandering mazes lost.

Paradise Lost.

Lord Brocklesby was so delighted at his second son's public spirit in consenting to stand for Shodborough, that he took a step which he had been contemplating for some time, and from which his wife had been very eager to dissuade him—he doubled Jack's allowance, and added to his will a codicil by which Jack would inherit a small unsettled property about equal to the present addition to his income, at his father's death. As the will stood before the codicil, Lady Brocklesby would have taken the property, and she was naturally much incensed, and looked round her anxiously for some means of revenge.

"You do it all, I suppose, for the *beaux yeux* of Alice," she said.

"Partly, my dear—partly," said Lord Brocklesby, somewhat nervously, "though I think I would have done the same had she squinted."

"It seems to me you are blind."

"No, I'm not, but I am getting a little deaf."

"Yes—to the calls of justice."

"My love, do you suppose Jack and his wife could possibly keep out of debt on five hundred pounds a year?"

"They are in debt as it is, and Alice is behaving very badly to my boy," cried her ladyship, angrily. "The more you give them, the worse it will be; and do you suppose that your wretched little hundreds can pay for Alice's dress? And *somebody* pays."

"What on earth do you mean, my lady?"

"Never mind. Some day you'll regret leaving your wife a pauper for the sake of——"

But even lady Brocklesby couldn't say the word that rose to her lips, and the conversation ended, leaving his lordship more or less happy with the conviction that he had annoyed his wife and yet had not laid himself open to any very terrible retaliation.

"There, darling," said Jack to Alice, when he heard of the addition to their income; "now we shall get on famously, particularly as we owe so little. Fancy if you were like Mrs. Belfort, or any of that lot! Why, we should have been broke long ago! But, by Jove, it's wonderful! You dress better than any one of them, and cost nothing! Good-bye, dearest!"

"Good-bye, Jack," said she, with tearful eyes. "Mind you write every day—twice a day if you can; and telegraph if I could do any good at Shodborough. How horrid this dinner at the Aquarium is! I should have had you for another three hours."

At the Aquarium were assembled Lord Badsworth; Mr. Curlingfield, the Shakespearian commentator and hypercritical philosopher, who would have revelled in the famous discussion as to how many angels could dance on the point of a pin; Johnny Beere, brimming over with bad puns and gay, nonsensical fun; Keyser, the gloomy moraliser, who kept his skeleton not in his cupboard, but in his pocket, and who allowed no banquet to pass over without its production; Sir John Glorme, the wicked man, about whom boys on entering London life spoke in awe-stricken whispers, and of whom stories were told that froze the blood of mothers, and caused all decent bodies to shudder; Flittery, the man about town, who lived no one knew how, but always on the best food and with the best company, and who knew a little of almost every conceivable subject; and Spencer Chillingham, who came with his eyeglass to help his brother with a little advice, and, if possible, to startle somebody by the negation of something they believed in.

After all, it requires some intelligence to hold a sincere creed; any fool can be a sceptic. The blue-nosed ape at the Zoological Gardens does not believe the sun will rise next day; it is so far above him that he scorns to have an opinion; but he does believe that the scheme of the world is conceived with a view to his receiving a certain amount of nuts every Saturday afternoon; and he gets the nuts, and the sun rises, and he says, "How foolish are the other apes who have creeds as to the sun which they can only see, while I believe alone in the nuts which I can crack and digest." So the blue-nosed ape is clever and *enlightened*, and never dreams that when the sun doesn't rise the nuts will cease to come. But such ideas as these had not entered the head of Spencer Chillingham, whose gospel of incredulity was credulous to the extremest degree, and who grovelled before the Pope of Disbelief more humbly than Ultramontane ever bowed down to the Monarch of the Vatican.

Their table was placed in a gallery overlooking the glass-covered hall, and as they unfolded their napkins and glanced at each other with that awkward suspicion which Britons usually affect before they are warmed with meat and drink, a band below struck up an inspiring medley of popular airs.

"I rise, gentlemen," said Johnny Beere, solemnly, "to protest against any flippancy to-night. This is an important occasion. My friend—our friend—Jack Chillingham, is about to enter the lists and tilt against the enemy. It is for us during dinner to discover what the enemy is. I propose, therefore, that we form ourselves into a mixture of a Social Science Congress and a St. James' Hall Conference to discuss, in the intervals of mastication, the several subjects upon our conversation *menu*."

"*Menuaille*, he means," said Flittery, twisting his moustache.

"Eh?" said Badsworth, amused.

"*Menuaille* is French for 'bosh,'" and Flittery smiled in a superior manner.

"The first subject is," went on Beere, referring to a card beside his plate, "'The Aim of Life.'"

"I know," said Flittery, still smiling and still superior. "*Aimer!*"

"Are we to make bad puns?" asked Spencer, angrily.

"The aim of life," said Keyser, dreamily, "of course it is to forget—to forget the past, to ignore the present, to shut out the future."

"What would you have, then?" said Badsworth, laughing.

"We should have"—and Keyser dropped his spoon and looked up at the glass roof—"we should have our Innerness—the life which is independent of the freaks of outside eventualities. I myself, who have succeeded in rising above all carnal feelings——"

"Sweet or dry champagne, sir?"

"Dry. I am able to look on happily, or if sadly, with only the qualified and charitable sadness of a spectator, at the passions and hopes and fears of the world. I am able——I don't think much of this champagne, Beere."

"Pooh!" cried Spencer, delighted at the pause occasioned by Keyser's sipping of his wine. "You are not put here to look on. We are all actors, and no one wants to be a *super*, or, if undertaking a big part, to be a stick. Everyone's duty is to fight against prejudice; and prejudice is rampant. The world is like a gigantic lunatic asylum, in which all the patients are not only curable, but are rapidly becoming well. The keepers know this very well, but also know that they will lose their salaries when all are sane and there is no need for the asylum; so they give the unfortunate patients everything they can imagine to keep them quietly mad, and only let one or two out now and then when their sanity is beyond question. But, nevertheless, there are so many sane ones inside now, that the keepers and doctors must soon be beaten, and the gates of the humbug-building be thrown wide open for all to go out."

"It strikes me we are wandering from the subject on the card, 'The Aim of Life,'" said Jack, looking at his brother with some dismay.

"The aim of life," said Curlingfield, rubbing up his hair, "is to enter into the glorious thoughts of the giants of old days."

"By Jove!" said Johnny Beere, quite puzzled.

"Take Shakespeare, for instance. I myself have written a pamphlet to prove that the disputed passage concerning 'runaway's eyes' was never——"

"Shakespeare!" interrupted Sir John Glorme, who had already obtained by skilful manœuvring two glasses of the Perier Jouet. "Shakespeare wrote for his time. Swinburne writes for ours. And as to 'runaway's eyes' —except that they are frequently d——d by the husband who stays at home—I don't see what they matter. Besides——"

"Gentlemen, gentlemen!" expostulated Beere, tapping the table with the handle of his knife. "'The Aim of Life,' *if* you please."

"The aim of life is to be happy," said Jack, hesitating.

"Yes, but how?" said Beere.

"By making others happy, of course," said Sir John Glorme, with a leer.

"To be happy," said Badsworth, looking rather sternly at the baronet, "it is absolutely necessary to be unselfish."

"Bah!" cried Spencer, "selfishness is the very mainspring of human movement. The whole fabric of civilization and religion is built upon it. What does the first mean?—Trade! What does trade mean?—A, B, or C trying to make a fortune for himself. And as to the second, what keeps the mob straight or makes them wish to keep so?—Fear for themselves of that——"

"'Something after death,'" put in Curlingfield, "which, as Hamlet says in the improved version I have ready for the press——'

"Selfishness," went on Spencer, hurriedly, "is the real power in the world. Energy is another name for it."

"So the aim of life is to be selfish?" said Jack.

"Not exactly," said Flittery, who had scarcely listened to the foregoing, being engaged in subduing by the power of his eye a young lady dining at the next table. "You must discriminate. The aim of life is to get on. If a man starts at the bottom of the ladder, he must see that his feet are firmly planted on each rung as he goes up. When they are firmly planted, and if he isn't obliged to hold on with his hands, he may use them to assist others —to the rung below him."

"Didn't it ever strike you," said Badsworth, "that we are all here engaged in trying to guess a riddle?"

"I never could guess riddles," murmured Keyser.

"And that it is well worth guessing? That life is not a mere lounge, but a school where the best boy will get to the top if he learns his lessons thoroughly?"

"But what the deuce is the lesson?" said Sir John. "I've studied human nature pretty closely for these last twenty years, and I only have found out two things."

"And what are they?" asked Jack, as the baronet paused.

"That men are great liars, and that women are greater liars."

"Twenty years—and that the result!" said Badsworth, half to himself.

"Well," said Sir John, turning on him, "what have you found out in your five years?"

"I think I have found out this—that we often make people what we think them. If you determine only to see the bad side of a man's or woman's character, that is the side you will be shown. When two people try to see each other's hearts, the good in one reflects the good in the other, and the bad the bad."

"God bless my soul!" cried Johnny Beere, "here's the fish done, and we are as far from having found out the aim of life as ever. What's the next subject? 'The Aim of Life' is abandoned; we come to 'The Causes of Success in Society.'"

"A pretty wife," said Sir John.

"Intellect," said Curlingfield.

"Effrontery," said Keyser.

"Stupidity and credulity," said Spencer.

"Good looks, good digestion, and knowledge of human nature," said Flittery.

"We might argue the point till dessert-time," said Badsworth; "it's too complicated. I should be inclined to say that a popular man may be anything except a man without a pleasant grin."

"The pleasant grin has it," cried Beere. "But Baddy's quite right. The subject is too big; we'll take a corner of it—'The Causes of Success with Women.'"

"Ah!" murmered Sir John, smacking his lips and looking positively fiendish in his archness.

"Earnestness," said Jack. "I fancy what women like most in men is for them to be thoroughly in earnest. They tell me that in foreign society, Englishmen are liked so much—although they are *gauche*, and usually unable to pay a compliment or walk out of a room—because they mean what they say."

"I don't think that," said Keyser. "Mystery is what women like. They only admire what they don't understand. Byron knew this when he hinted at his mysterious crimes and unholy passions."

"My dear boys," said Sir John, pulling his shirt-sleeves over his chalky knuckles with an air, "you are both at fault. Woman's one great pleasure in a man is to deprive her female friends of him. You remember the old story of the young man who went to the head of one great firm and asked for his daughter, saying the other great firm was about to make him partner; and went to the head of

the latter firm and asked to be made partner on the ground that he was to marry the daughter of Firm No. 1 —and got both. Well, that's the kind of thing I mean. Make Mrs. A. think Mrs. B. longs for you, and make Mrs. B. think Mrs. A. pines for you; and, by gad, sir, they both begin to long and pine, for the sake of spiting each other."

Keyser looked intensely disgusted during this speech.

"They talk of women," he said half to himself, "and the word *love* is never even mentioned."

"Why should it be?" asked Spencer. "What is it? A sham—a poetical delusion. A thing some half-witted fop, who had nothing better to do while guarding his sheep on Parnassus, invented as a compliment to himself when he talked nonsense to his shepherdess. I don't want to be coarse, for I know it shocks Flittery, but the plain fact is, that love consists solely——"

"Hi, hi!" cried Beere, bringing his knife down on the table with a bang. "You're off the track. Pull up. I don't see anything of love in the *menu*, though there *was* turtle soup. No, it's time for the subject of the evening. Jack's thirsting to astonish us with a brief account of the Constitution. 'Politics!'"

"Define politics," said Keyser, who had not spared the champagne, snorting with pleasure at the prospect of puzzling even Spencer Chillingham.

"Politics," said the latter, adjusting his eye-glass, "is the art of keeping the majority of a nation under the delusion that they ought to be content to be poor, powerless, and downtrodden, and hiding from them the fact that they could kick their masters into the sea at any moment. The fabric of civilized life is built entirely on imposture, and *politics* forms the machinery by which the charlatans, who have climbed to the top on the ladder of universal ignorance, work."

"I'm sure," said Flittery, deprecatingly, "politicians, as a rule, are far from being charlatans. Consider for a

moment how all the best men in England join the House of Commons, and remember what the House of Lords is!"

"I do, indeed," said Spencer, shuddering; "the most splendid exhibition of arrogant stupidity to be seen in the world."

"Really, Chillingham," said Flittery, his colour rising, "I am ready to listen to many extraordinary remarks from you; but, as I happen to have two uncles in the House, I must beg——"

"No quarrelling," said Beere, "and stick to the subject. Let the candidate for Shodborough tell us what he thinks."

CHAPTER XIII.

Gratiano speaks an infinite deal of nothing, more than any man in all Venice: his reasons are as two grains of wheat hid in two bushels of chaff.

Merchant of Venice.

"I DON'T quite agree with my brother there as to politics —that is, the definition of the term," said Jack, wondering whether the Aquarium authorities would object to his smoking a cigarette; "and I don't see the good of my telling you fellows what *I* think. Our object is to settle what I am to think."

"Of course," cried Johnny Beere; "so it is. It's a mere question of choice of parties, as the linkman said, when he read *The Morning Post*, and the biggest party is the best, or at any rate that at which there is most 'carriage company.'"

"Yes, there's the grand fault of our system," said Spencer. "The meddling of the well-to-do classes with politics is most pernicious. How can a man with a good coat legislate with a proper respect for rags; a man with clean hands see nothing disagreeable in dirty ones; a contented man know anything of the majority of his countrymen, the discontented?"

"Why, would you like to see the American plan—the politicians a low and despised class—adopted here?" asked Flittery, in a tone of horror.

"Not a bit of it," said Spencer, firmly. "The politicians of America, for all their apparent fierceness, are Philistines. No! I hold that all but labouring men are merely ornamental; the real flesh and blood is to be found——"

"In Mr. Bright's *residuum*?" asked Badsworth, smil-

ing. "And where would you and the other well-conducted Democrats be then?"

"What matter where we are so long as power is in the proper hands?" cried Spencer, enthusiastically. "Oh, I'd give every hope of fame or success I have, just to see the prosy nobodies I have to listen to for such dreary hours in the House kicked off their pedestals by a lot of strong-minded nature—educated shoemakers."

"There's nothing like leather," murmured Beere.

"Man," went on Spencer, warming to his theme, "man is so ignorant as yet that he does not know what a grand thing he is when stripped of all the artificial and effete attributes which silly custom has grafted on to him. They tell us we cannot make a Utopia, and I ask why not? Pooh! We can make anything. We are omnipotent as regards ourselves; and as to equality—perfect and pure and simple equality—being impossible, why, the only wonder is that a little knot of people who happen to hold the gold and silver of the world should have been able so long to prevent its advent. It will come—it is coming fast—but I fear we have lived rather too early."

"Never mind, old chap," said Beere, clapping him consolingly on the shoulder; "cheer up, and remember that if you had lived any later you would have missed Zazel."

"But I don't quite see," said Jack, who was rather impressed by his brother's enthusiasm, "how all this helps me. I can't go and tell the Shodborough people to divide the Duke of Cheshire's property amongst them."

"Good God!" said Flittery, "Shodborough is intensely Tory. You *must* be blue there."

"Must I?" said Jack, feeling that at last something practical had been arrived at.

"Green enough here," said Beere, *par parenthèse*. "By Jove, here's Zazel! We must shelve our debate for a bit, eh?"

"No; I'll tell you what we'll do," said Badsworth. "Each shall write down as shortly as he can his opinion on the different subjects of the day, and Curlingfield, who is a master of the language, shall weld the thing into one harmonious whole. Seeing that young lady on the wire will perhaps keep us duly impressed by the beauty of the old theory of the balance of power, and the cannon part remind us of the horrors of war."

This proposition was assented to, and after a short time the following admirable address was with some conscious pride produced by Curlingfield:

"To the Electors of Shodborough:

"Gentlemen,—I am unable to resist the request of so many influential inhabitants of your borough, and I beg to offer myself as a candidate for the vacancy in your representation in Parliament. It being advisible that no doubt should exist as to my opinions on the several questions which now divide men's minds, I will as briefly as possible, tell you exactly what I think on each of them.

"Taking what is called the Eastern Question first, it appears to me that while another war in defence of a corrupt state such as Turkey would be most impolitic, the occupation of any part of that kingdom by Russia would be detrimental to the interests of this country; and that, although a causeless jealousy of Russia is most unworthy of us, it is the duty of Her Majesty's Government to allow no fear of propping up even Turkish misrule to stand in the way of preserving a proper balance of power in Europe, and the absolute freedom from danger of our empire in the East.

"My opinion as to the proposed extension of the franchise is simple. I consider that the agricultural labourer is the perfect equal of many to whom the right of voting has long ago been given; but I should be strongly against any so-called reform in this direction if it interfered

in any way with the power enjoyed by the present electors.

"As to the Church of England, for which I have the deepest respect, I should be most strongly against any measure of disestablishment, unless I believed that in the interests of freedom and in deference to the mighty and enlightened body of Nonconformists, such a measure could be considered necessary.

"The game laws no doubt press hardly upon those persons who want game and are prevented by circumstances from preserving it; at the same time I am bound to say that there is nothing more sacred, more bound up with the prosperity of this country, than the rights of property. A measure which gave the poorest cottager an inalienable right to the wild creatures provided by Nature, and retained for game preservers those other rights which are to my mind so essential, would meet with my hearty support.

"And I hold the same firm opinion as to the laws connected with land. Should it ever be advisable to make changes here, they should be such as to satisfy the landowner, whose greatness is bound up with the greatness of England, while bringing peace, happiness, and prosperity to the doors of every farmer and labourer in the land.

"To the Irish among you, I will go so far as to say that, calling together the glories of the old House in College Green, where Grattan, Curran, Shiel, and Flood thundered their splendid rhetoric, I would gladly yield to them the Home Rule they demand; with only this proviso, that not the smallest change be made in our glorious Constitution, as amended in the year 1800.

"I shall be amongst you almost immediately, and shall be happy to answer any question you may desire to put to me; although I apprehend, after this clear enunciation of my views, that there will be little necessity for this course."

"Very clear and concise," said Beere, sending for an

envelope; "and nevertheless leaves you so free. We'll have it posted in case you should forget it or leave it in your pocket."

And in High Street, Shodborough, next day, there was much rubbing of spectacles and pondering over this document; and while Mr. Horton, the Conservative agent, asserted stoutly that Mr. Chillingham was "Blue to the backbone," Mr. Rellible, the butcher, who was strongly suspected of toying with the advanced Liberal party, although he supplied the FitzCrewe family with meat, declared that there was no doubt the young gentleman belonged to Birmingham School.

And when Mr. Hopgoal, the son of the oil and colourman, and the idol of the Republican Club held at the Goat and Horns, read the address, he turned pale, and shivered at the thought of what his brother Republicans would say, could they see him baffled by the words of a member of the effete aristocracy. But, then, poor Mr. Hopgoal did not know that the address had been written after a great deal of Perier-Jouet, amid the boundings of Zazel, applause of the spectators, and braying of a lively band. Perhaps if he had known this, he would have burned his books, even his copy of Tom Paine, and fled to some land where life is taken more seriously.

The result of the efforts of Mr. Curlingfield was that, when Mr. Horton and a choice deputation of "Blue" citizens attended that afternoon at The FitzCrewe Arms, they were perfectly in the dark as to Jack's opinions, and that unfortunate youth found himself under the necessity of forming these opinions hurriedly as he sat on a hard-backed chair, faced by half-a-dozed perspiring gentlemen in shiny black frock-coats, also on hard-backed chairs; while, as the ready question preceded the reluctant and stammering reply for two mortal hours, and the cuckoo came out of the clock on the wall at intervals and laughed at him, and the sun shone on him and seemed to dry up what little brains he possessed, and the children playing

in the road screamed and put his half-formed answer to flight, and flies settled on his nose and drove him mad, our poor hero felt that, after this, he would have borne patiently all the tortures of the Inquisition.

In the end, however, Mr. Horton carried him triumphantly through, and, at a great meeting held at the town-hall two days afterwards, he was adopted as a fit and proper person to represent Shodborough in Parliament, although he scarcely as yet knew what his political opinions were or were supposed to be.

CHAPTER XIV.

. . . In the fatness of these pursy times
Virtue itself of vice must pardon beg.

Hamlet.

It was impossible that Alice could see so much of two such women as her mother-in-law and Mrs. Belfort without being in some degree contaminated. Hers was an impressionable, credulous nature, assimilating itself insensibly to those natures with which it came in contact, and by reason of its ignorance of guile failing to see harm where less pure ones would have recoiled with horror. She had many points in common with her husband—his impulsiveness and absence of suspicion; and it was easier for her to believe that the things she had always considered wrong were not so very wrong after all, than to believe that they were as wrong as she had supposed, and yet were commonly practised by those amongst whom she lived. All the young married women she met appeared to own admirers as naturally as they owned parasols; and where there was no concealment or attempt at concealment it was difficult to believe there could be wrong, or what poor Alice considered wrong's companion, shame.

For the last two months Lord Windermere had been so continually at her elbow in public, that gradually the whole of her acquaintances had tacitly agreed to look upon him as part of her establishment; and—Jack having already sufficient of the husband about him not to enjoy being a *cavaliere servente*—she *did* find it agreeable enough to have a good-looking, pleasant young man always at hand to anticipate and obey her lightest wish. Besides, he was decidedly the principal target at which mothers were shooting, for his wealth was considerable,

and what woman—the sweetest, the most unselfish—can resist the pleasure of making her sisters angry?

Jack Chillingham, whose knowledge of London and London ways was very limited, would no more have dreamed of hinting that Lord Windermere was too much with his wife than of knocking her down. Lady Brocklesby, by cleverly-dropped bits of admiration at Alice's success and other women's discomfiture, associated Lord Windermere in her mind with an agreeable sensation. Mrs. Belfort took the whole thing so much as a matter of course, that Alice, when with her, felt ashamed of the importance she attached to it; indeed Mrs. Belfort would as soon have thought of going out without a gown as without a lover. Jack himself liked to have Windermere to save him trouble, and indeed expense, in many little ways; and thought that his own conversation and parts were as much that nobleman's attraction as Alice's company; besides which, Jack, who was of that comfortable order of beings who are satisfied with their own things because they *are* their own, thought that Perkins (the £26 a year kitchen-maid who was so reckless with the dripping) was sufficient to bring any *gourmet* to North Street. Thus all combined to make the downward road easy to Alice's pretty feet; and the world looked on, and nodded and smiled, and was ready to turn from her with contempt when she reached the bottom, to find no way up again. As yet, however, the decline was very gradual, and on either side the roses bloomed, and merry companions in bright clothes made the road gay enough. Hurlingham, Prince's, the Orleans Club, countless dinners, parties, and balls, race-meetings, garden-parties, invitations to country-house for the winter; and, above all, a constant shower of delicate flattery, of only half-concealed love-making, of passionate glances, and of triumph over other women—if Alice's head had not been turned she would have been a Gorgon; and what woman ever was a Gorgon? Since the episode of the £1000 cheque,

Windermere's manner had not altered, as she was inclined to believe it would. On the contrary, it was more deeply respectful than ever, and if she sometimes surprised a passionate look in his eyes, it *was* a surprise, and he always at once averted his gaze, and appeared confused. In many indirect methods he humbly apologised for the kiss he had in a moment of ungovernable feeling ventured to press upon her hand, until at length Alice, full of pity for his apparent remorse, was almost driven to tell him there was no harm in it. Windermere knew well when to "make the running" and when to "wait," although it required a prize as fair as was Alice Chillingham to induce him to remain behind so long and so patiently. He knew perfectly well what the world said, and therefore had all the prestige of a success; the delights thereof were, in his opinion, not far off. The main difficulty was that he had not as yet been able to hit upon the weak place in Alice's armour. Her innocence was not stupidity; her vanity was too small to have much influence on her actions; her impatience of control was something, and Badsworth's interference had certainly furthered his cause; and as to her love for Jack, or her capabilities of loving, Windermere had very hazy notions as to the meaning of the word: looking at "love" as a convenient form of expressing coarse ideas in a drawing-room. He had easily fathomed Badsworth's feeling towards Alice, and it was with some pleasure that he beheld the suicidal step of interference taken by that young gentleman. Badsworth, on the other hand, was driven nearly mad by the calm way in which Alice had been, so to speak, handed over to Windermere, and cursed Jack in his heart for a booby unworthy of a pretty wife.

When the latter had been about a week at Shodborough, and reported that another five days would finish the task of cajoling the electors for the present, a small party was got up by Mrs. Belfort for the purpose of attending the French play, and afterwards taking the taste of the *double*

entendres out of their mouths by means of a supper at Lord Windermere's chambers.

"Somehow I don't think Jack would *quite* like it," said Alice.

"Nonsense, dear!" said Mrs. Belfort. "What is there to dislike in it?"

"You see—Lord Windermere's chambers——"

"They're very nice ones; such pretty pictures—classical, you know, dear; it's wonderful to think how small the milliners' bills must have been in classical days!"

And Mrs. Belfort sighed as she thought of the forthcoming wrangle over her own extravagance which she had annually with her husband; for on this point only did he dare speak, his commercial instincts for once supplying him with some semblance of authority.

"Well, I suppose I had better say yes. What is the party?"

"There are you and I and Mrs. Jellaby and Lady Glorme, and each of us brings our man. I've Charlie Holster, Tiny Jellaby has Jim Sunnerton, Kitty Glorme has Flittery, and you, of course, have our noble host."

"I hate all this pairing," said Alice, impatiently.

"Nature, my love," said Mrs. Belfort, calmly, "only nature."

With the exception of our heroine, a *faster* party than this could not well have been got together, even by Mrs. Belfort; and when Badsworth, who was in a box with some men, saw them enter the stalls, he groaned aloud. In one of the intervals between the acts he met Windermere in the lobby.

"Come to supper with me to-night?" asked the latter. "All that lot are coming."

"No thank you," said Badsworth, stiffly, biting his lip with vexation.

At the door of the theatre, when they were waiting for their carriage, he made an effort.

"Must you go to this supper?" he asked.

"Must I?" said Alice, mocking him and laughing. "No, I don't suppose I must, except that I am hungry."

"I wish you wouldn't."

"Do you? Why?" she asked, carelessly.

"Because—because—— *Do* you think, Mrs. Chillingham, that Jack——"

"Here's your brougham," said Windermere, coming up. "Can you give me a lift?"

Alice hesitated, and met Badworth's reproachful eye.

"Certainly," she said; and they drove off.

The supper party was an immense success, as supper-parties often are. Lady Glorme sang little love songs exquisitely, and gazed fondly the while into Flittery's eyes; Mrs. Jellaby was in a splendid vein of somewhat *risqué* humour, and kept them all in roars of laughter and Alice in an agony of blushes; and Charlie Holster and Jim Sunnerton danced a burlesqued *cancan* in a style which enraptured the company.

The chambers consisted of two rooms, in the inner one of which the piano stood; and when Alice sat down to it to sing them an English ballad, whose innocence was like a ray of sunlight there amid the garnish glitter of the gas, the others sat in the front room to listen; all save Windermere, who leant over the piano and gazed at Alice's small head and white shoulders with quickening pulse. The champagne had passed around briskly, as good wine does, and he was not as much master of himself as usual. Not that he was drunk; no one had ever seen him to show signs of having taken too much wine; but his passions were more fierce, and his prudence weaker than they should have been. And Alice—will readers turn from this tale with loathing, if we say that a woman, even the purest, cannot drink three, or even two glasses of strong champagne, amid a Babel of laughter, joke, and song, without her imagination being a little excited—without her blood circulating a little quicker than in the morning? Moved by her own simple song, she

turned to her neighbour instinctively for sympathy and met his passionate gaze.

"Your song was cold," he said. "They married and had children, and went to church, and were happy ever after. Here's a little thing from the French, which I heard the other day." And as she rose and stood by the piano, he sat down and sang in a true if not powerful voice, with much expression:

"My soul has a secret, my life has its mystery,
My heart is struck down to the ground at a blow,
'Tis so hopeless I fain would conceal the sad history,
For she who has done it her deed does not know.

Not all my life's homage to her unperceiving it
Would render less lonely my heart's solitude;
Alone I should live in the cold world, and leaving it,
Leave her unwon; nay, leave her unwoo'd.

Straight is her path; not to right nor to left of it
Turn her soft eyes, although God made her kind;
She recks not of love nor of those who, bereft of it,
Murmur of death and despair to the wind.

And all but her duty austerely unheeding,
She'll glance o'er these verses, so hot with my flame;
And sweetly unconscious she'll turn from her reading
Of her that I love, and will ask me—her name!"

Alice was silent; she did not care a straw for the man at her side, but she was *tête montée*—in a state when a woman should be in church or under lock and key. Her imagination was on fire; the world seemed all love—gentle pure love, such as angels may feel unblamed.

"My darling," whispered Windermere, suddenly catching her to him almost fiercely; and his lips met hers, and for a moment—for a short moment—she suffered him, and did not even turn her head away.

But his triumph was short.

"Lord Windermere!" she cried (the noise in the next room luckily being at its height), wrenching herself with an effort from his grasp, and confronting him with flaming

eyes—"you have insulted me! I will never speak to you again!"

He attempted to speak; but with an imperious gesture she turned away and entered the next room.

"Mr. Flittery, will you see if my carriage has come? It is much later than I thought. Oh, it *is* there! Thanks. Good-night."

"I'm sure there was a row," said Flittery, as he walked to his club with Sunnerton. "Probably she is spending too much for his lordship. Did you notice her eyes when she came into the room? By gad, how splendid she looks in a rage!"

CHAPTER XV.

If but a woman's heart might see
Such erring heart unerringly
For once! But that may never be.

D. G. ROSSETTI.

THE electors of Shodborough were much taken by the frank pleasant manner of the young candidate sent down by the Duke of Cheshire; and as his grace allowed his agents to spend money much as they pleased, all went merry as a marriage-bell in the little town, and Jack began to think politics not such weary work after all. He had some sense of humour, and the canvass disclosed to him many amusing *interiors*, which made amends for countless hot and heavy afternoon dinners of which he was frequently compelled to partake. The (politically speaking) weak-kneed butcher was his staunch ally now, and had no doubt whatever but that Jack was not so very "Blue" after all; while the patriotic band of Republicans were in despair, and hated the aristocracy more tragically than ever.

Mr. Flittery, who liked to make himself useful to dukes, came down to bear our hero company, and share some of his burdens of politeness; and Flittery was not to be despised as an assistant, for had soft words been able to do so, he could have buttered all the parsnips in all the gardens of England. Mr. Horton reported to the Duke that the seat might be pronounced as nearly safe, and Mr. Tollebens be now permitted to accept the stewardship of those mysterious things, the Chiltern Hundreds, coupled with a baronetcy, the price of his retirement. Jack was beginning to become a little *wife-sick*, if we may coin a word, and longed to see Alice's bright eyes again; so he

received with much satisfaction Mr. Horton's announcement that in a few days he might go back to town, there to hold himself ready to swoop down upon the electors directly the vacancy actually occurred. But before he went he had one other duty to perform, which was to assist at the opening of the new Theatre Royal, Shodborough, built by the Duke, who was fond of the drama, and presented by him to the town. All the dead walls—and there were an astonishing number of dead walls at Shodborough—were covered with yellow posters, quite eclipsing the modest blue ones which contained Jack's address, announcing that the eminent tragedian, Mr. Arthur Arnington, and the star of burlesque, Miss Violet Vandeleur, WERE COMING, and that a performance would be given on such a night "by special request of His Grace the Duke of Cheshire, the Honourable John Chillingham, and Mr. Peter Weekes, Mayor."

* * * * * *

It was four years before the time of which we are writing that Captain Reginald Hargrave, of Her Majesty's Fourth Regiment of Foot Guards, was returning from hunting with the H——shire foxhounds. He had seen a good run from a good position, and was going slowly home in that agreeable frame of mind engendered by the consciousness of having acquitted himself well. His horse was rather leg-weary, and, with a cigar in his mouth, he walked beside it, every now and then resting his hand affectionately upon the mane. A good-looking, broad-shouldered youth, like many others you can see any day on parade, or slowly traversing the cool Arcade of Burlington—not much intellect, but a good conscience, a splendid appetite, and a total ignorance of fear. Why should Nelly, the pretty daughter of Farmer Tilcott, of the Crown Farm, have been standing at the little rustic door that led into the orchard just as the captain passed ?

Was it chance or was it fate, or had the little flirt seen the red coat from her window and descended? All that is certain is, that she blushed prettily as he took off his hat and stood still, apparently somewhat embarrassed on his side.

She spoke first.

"I hope you've had good sport, Captain Hargrave?"

The voice was low and soft, with just enough of the country accent to add piquancy to it.

"Capital, Miss Tilcott," said the Captain, looking at her with all his eyes; "but I think meeting you is the best part of the day."

"Oh, Captain Hargrave! Men always say those silly things, but they don't mean them."

"By jingo, I do, though; but I can't keep old Marmion standing still. Will you walk a little way down the road with me?"

"Poor Marmion!" said Nelly, laying her little hand—not as white as some in Belgravia, but well-shaped and pleasing to the eye—on the horse's neck; "yes, I can walk a little way, though papa wouldn't like it."

And then they walked together very slowly, and the old story was commenced—the sad old story of credulity and passion, of folly and crime, of momentary happiness and life-long remorse. How often they met that winter, until Hargrave was obliged to go back to town and duty; how Nelly pined for her absent lover; how they corresponded stealthily by means of a married sister in the village; how he hesitated between what his relations would have called folly and what he knew to be crime and cowardice; how he chose the latter; and how a pure and trusting maiden became, because of her very trust and purity, a thing which all properly brought up people should shun with loathing and contempt, it matters little to enter into here. The whole thing is so sad, and, alas! so common. It is happening every day, it will go on happening, and it has always happened. As long as the

world is divided into classes, and as long as hearts refuse always to recognize the barriers which divide them, so long will there occur these lapses from the path which seems so broad to those who have never been tempted out of it.

Reginald Hargrave was no exceptional villain, no wicked baronet of melodrama, to whom rustic virtue is an absurdity; he simply yielded to what appeared to him a stern necessity; for who could doubt that when duty and inclination clashed, the former, at least where a woman was concerned, should give way?

He could neither forbear to see his loving little Nelly, nor could he brave his father and astonish his scoffing and sceptical brother-officers by marrying her. So he fell back on the proverb, *in medio tutissimus*, and was very happy and made her very happy for a time, until she found out what she had become, and knew that in complying with his love she had, though he himself scarcely knew it, lost his respect. Then all the usual results followed. There is a great sameness in these stories. Quarrels, neglect, misery, separation; and the man drinks the waters of Lethe, and the woman the cup of degradation; the one adds a feather to his cap and receives more adulation from his fellows, and the other is clothed with shame as with a garment, and finds no course left for her but to exult in her degradation if she would not die of it. Nelly Tilcott, discarded by her family, deserted by her lover, looked round for a means of existence, and chose the theatre. Super, ballet-girl, small parts, an attempt at a better one in a country theatre—success. She climbed the ladder easily enough, thanks to a pretty face and some intelligence; and when, as Miss Violet Vandeleur, she came to Shodborough, she was a star of some importance in that lesser heaven occupied by the queens of burlesque.

No one seemed to be at all surprised at Sir John Glorme's appearance with her, nor at his taking the two

best boxes in the theatre for every night of the company's stay in the town. Several of the Shodborough ladies—notably the wife of the principal solicitor—said it was disgusting, and would have hissed poor Nelly if they had dared; but, oddly enough, they did not seem half so angry with Sir John—who must have had something to do with the matter, after all—and were delighted when Jack presented them and their husbands and daughters to that estimable baronet.

CHAPTER XVI.

Gratis est mort ; plus d'amour sans payer :
En beaux louis se content les fleurettes.

De la Fontaine.

Sir John Glorme was not a man much subject to emotion; every part of him, heart included, was as tough as his face looked; yet his *liaison*—or whatever the word may be for such things—with Miss Violet Vandeleur was of more importance to him, was more necessary to his welfare, than most previous affairs of the sort. He did not know that the absolute purity of her mind (a sad contrast, alas! to what of her was not mind) was the cause of the hold she had over his senses.

"A pretty woman is like a good dinner," he said; "there are many cooks clever enough to entice you to eat more than is good for you; but, by gad! this woman is like a better dinner than any ever eaten at Bignon's—you can't stop eating, and yet you feel none the worse for it."

Nelly—or Violet, as we had better call her—saw the best side of Sir John's character, not knowing that she had been the first to bring to light the fact that there was any side to it not wholly bad, and did not hate him. Their union was, in her opinion, a purely mercenary transaction, in which she would most scrupulously be honest as long as the bargain which she had made was honestly carried out. The poor child hated herself—as she now was—so much that she had no strong feeling of any kind left for others. She was popular behind the footlights, because of her absence of professional jealousy; and in front of them the many young men who raved of her, and sent her bouquets and bracelets, and spent weary hours at stage-doors to see her enter her—or Sir John's—brougham,

voted her either as cold as ice, or else a wonderful specimen of fidelity.

And she was faithful, in a weary, sad way that would have touched a worse man—if such existed—than Sir John Glorme.

She had chosen her life—at least so she said to herself, ignoring, woman-like, the fact that a certain captain with blue eyes had been a scoundrel to her; she had chosen her life, and she would at least live that life with as little reproach as possible. She did sometimes remember the old days in H——shire, when she only dreamed of handsome princes and dukes, who came to woo and wed the farmer's daughter, in the intervals of real enjoyment and innocent laughter, which seldom gave an opportunity for day-dreaming. She did sometimes wonder, with a dull aching at her heart—which Heaven forbid you, reader, may ever have—why she had felt so unutterably happy when his lips had first met hers; and she did sometimes long, but with a longing that was almost killed at its inception by despair, for one hour of her old feeling to return, so that she might be able once more to believe, to trust, to sin, even, but to sin, without knowing of the shame.

Everything was so cut and dried now. No sentiment, no illusions, no romance. Carriages, diamonds, houses in Brompton, perpetual laughter and empty love-making, applause of the stalls, envious glances from the boxes, enthusiasm of the gallery—bah! she would have given all these for one second of the thrill that used to be called up when that somewhat stupid guardsman touched her hand and gave vent to an inane compliment.

But it had gone; quicker than youth, anticipating that restless visitor, beauty. Only four years! And here she was—she thought a fair temple it might be, but nothing but ruin within. To act, to eat and drink, and have a sufficiently rich protector, that was her aim in life.

Poor Violet! Could Sir John Glorme, as he gloats over you as his property, and hugs himself with the conscious-

ness of being envied, only know what a tumult of unarranged thoughts are surging within that well-shaped head, what incomprehended desires are disturbing that little brain, which he thinks never goes beyond dreams of a new gown or anticipation of a Richmond dinner on Sunday, he would be, not ashamed, for men of his stamp leave that at their first school, but rather alarmed. Poor Violet! Impetuous, truthful, loving (though she knew it not then), there was a whole poem in her nature, and man—slave of habit—could only read the sad prose he had himself tried to scrawl upon her heart.

As she had two names, so she had two beings. There was the Nelly Tilcott, who had believed in love, and who had given up everything that made life worth having for her lover; and there was Violet Vandeleur, the burlesque actress, who believed in nothing and nobody—not even in herself—and had buried her heart, or thought she had buried it, in the same grave which had gaped to swallow up her character. Such was the young lady who, with but little to hide the charms of her person, played before Mr. Weekes, the Mayor of Shodborough, Mr. Flittery, and our hero, and was kind enough to accept an invitation afterwards offered by the two latter to sup at the FitzCrewe Arms Hotel.

It was a very pleasant entertainment, and certainly equalled in gaiety, if not in refinement, that other supper in Windermere's chambers of which we have heard. The champagne was not good; but Flittery had taken care that it should be well iced, and ice is to wine as fox-hunting is said to be to society—it brings all classes together on a footing of equality or nearly so.

Violet Vandeleur had a half-mocking, half-sad manner that was very captivating, if a little bewildering at times to the tyro: and Jack caught himself once or twice wondering whether she were laughing at him or no. A tinge of bitterness lay under the surface of her mirth, and a close observer might often remark the cruel—if covert

—sneer with which she received a compliment to her beauty. The sneer was at herself, but those who saw it naturally were alarmed, and it came to be understood at those clubs where young men do congregate that Violet V. (as she was termed) was not one to be "tackled" with impunity, or until the hardy cavalier had a certain amount of wine beneath his belt. Jack Chillingham was thoroughly disgusted at the coarse speeches which Sir John Glorme permitted to escape him, and at which Violet did not even pretend to blush; but he was pleased to observe that she never replied to or seemed much amused by them; and once or twice he thought he detected a look of intense sadness cross her features before the Baronet's chuckle over his own wit had quite died out. Flittery wondered lazily why Lady Brocklesby was so anxious to part her second son from his wife, and rather wished he had not engaged himself—for reasons connected with a certain invitation to a very select house into which Flittery had not yet succeeded in creeping—to assist her in her project. But Alice might have read all Jack's thoughts, as he sat beside the burlesque actress and tried to understand the magnitude of the gulf which divided her from her sisters with titles in Mayfair. Of course he could see at once that she was not exactly what he called a "lady;" there was still in her voice a trace of the old country "burr;" and the natural brusque grace with which she moved had not—although perfect in its way—

> That repose
> Which stamps the caste of Vere de Vere;

while she seemed this evening somewhat defiantly to fling her profession in his face by using theatrical slang and insisting on "shop" talk.

Mr. Arthur Arington, the tragedian, who only became "eminent" when out of London, being contented with very small parts when in that city, behaved himself exactly as a tragedian should do. He was laconic, gloomy

mysterious; his hair was long, his eyes glittered, his gait was dignified, until, unfortunately, a ninth tumbler of champagne proved too strong for even this worthy descendant of the school of rant; and he dropped his "h's," forgot his dignity, gloom, and mystery, hiccuped like a low comedian, and was eventually carried to bed by two waiters, while he, in most affectionate if maudlin terms, apostrophised Sir John Glorme as one to whom his heart "would ever warm in friendship's tenderest tie."

But before this untoward if not unexpected event occurred, Violet had left them, with a glance from her deep dark eyes into Jack's face which made that incipient politician remark to himself for the fiftieth time that night, "Poor girl! What a pity! that old brute, Glorme!" and, going to bed perhaps the least bit affected by the amount of doubtful champagne the laws of good fellowship had compelled him to swallow, he fell asleep, and dreamt that he rescued the black-eyed damsel from a host of dragons (all with some resemblance to Sir John) himself gorgeously and becomingly attired in golden armour, and bestriding the winner of that year's Derby but that when—the sward being covered with defunct monsters, and Violet clad in the costume of Aladdin, safe and sound—he rode with his vizor raised, to receive his reward at the hands of the Queen of Beauty, that lady, who was no other than his wife, reviled him horribly, and finally condemned him to reside in Shodborough High Street with Mr. Horton, and make a speech every day from the balcony on the subject of the incidence of taxation.

And while Jack wasted his time dreaming, Mr. Flittery, after plunging his face in cold water, lit another cigarette and wrote to Lady Brocklesby a letter which detailed all the events of the past twelve hours.

CHAPTER XVII.

But love is such a mystery,
I cannot find it out;
For when I think I am best resolved,
Then I am most in doubt.

SUCKLING.

FOR man was invented logic; for woman the art of reasoning by sentiment; and as the male monopolises, and sometimes makes sad nonsense of, the first science, so does the female take the other to her fair bosom, and cherishing it there as only woman can cherish an absurdity, make the sickly thing live and flourish, and often get the better of its robust and real brother. With a fair field and no favour of intellect, we would back the deductions formed by feminine wishes, joined with vague reminiscences of a brother's or a brother's tutor's catchwords, against all the hard-and-fast proved facts of all the Oxford professors. Angry as Alice was with Windermere for having dared to kiss her, she was still more angry with him for using those words—"My darling." This was indeed preposterous, audacious, wicked to the last degree. She was not *his* darling; she was nobody's darling; darlings ceased to be such when they married, or at least after the honeymoon. As to the kiss—well, there are few women, even the most austere, who think very much of a kiss. Perhaps they lack the nerve from the lips to the heart which Voltaire mentions, and which the sterner sex probably possesses. It may be that a kiss is so essentially the antechamber of love to them, that they no more are affected by it than we are by the entrance-hall of a king's house. Of course we know that to get into the august presence we must pass through the hall, but it is not until the lackey has his hand on the door of the re-

ception-room that our heart begins to beat and our knees to incline inwards. To a man who has reached, through vanity and a wish to excel his dogs and horses, the semi-sentimentalism which does duty for the whole article in this "empty day," a kiss is the very embodiment of ecstasy; the exact mingling of love as poets have it with love as men have it, which suits his real sensualism and his sham sentiment.

"The first kiss of love" is such a pretty thing—until we find that the second kiss is rather better; and—— But we are leaving little Alice Chillingham all this time with tearful eyes, swallowing her wrath as best she may, and her breakfast not at all, as she sits with a letter before her in the place where her plate of buttered toast should be.

"Can you forgive me? I shall never forgive myself. Yet to explain my madness would be another insult. Oh, Mrs. Chillingham! you in your purity can never understand what a demon a man can be when—— But I will not—I dare not try to excuse myself. I was drunk, I think—not with wine! Will you believe me when I promise never to offend again? or must I go away and never see you again? Surely it can be no crime to see you sometimes, and to talk about the weather? I am sane again now. I know what your servant will say when I call, but can you not think that the brute of last night is dead, and that the Windermere who is alive has no connection with him? Of course you are angry, and so am I; and both of us with the same person. Surely here we are agreed, at any rate? There is nothing I would not do to reinstate myself in your good opinion; for I feel—pardon my presumption if I am wrong—that you in some sense know me better than others—that you have penetrated what might be called the crust of worldliness which we are all covered with in London, and know that I am not quite the brainless money-spending machine I pretend to be. You are growing still more angry as you

read this letter ; you are vowing to yourself that you will never see the conceited fool who insulted you again ; but remember that, come what may, you cannot prevent me always being your friend—your true, your respectful friend through life."

There certainly was nothing in this letter to offend her anew ; yet she felt that the very writing of it was a fresh fault, and she also knew—though she scarcely owned it even to herself—what the forgiving of his offence would in truth mean. No amount of sophistry on either of their parts could prevent their future friendship or acquaintanceship being of a different kind from what it had been before. They had their secret, which would, whenever they met, be in their thoughts, and each would know it was in the mind of the other. No ; she could not, in honesty to Jack, whom she loved, forgive this impertinent, troublesome, good-looking lord. She would not answer his letter, and strict orders should be given not to admit him. Of course they must meet in society, and anything in the shape of *cutting* would only make people talk ; but her converse with him should be henceforth but " Yea " and " Nay," and it would be hard if he found an opportunity of even asking her to forgive him.

And yet he was very charming ; his manner had that soft caress in it which comes so well from six feet of manliness, and he had been so far educated as to be able to touch lightly and pleasantly enough on many subjects above the ordinary society style of conversation. Although frivolous, he knew how to make his frivolity graceful ; and although cynical, his cynicism could seem at times only the cloak for a generous, almost a confiding disposition. Moreover, Windermere had also all the advantages which repeated conquests give a man ; the confidence, the experience, the art *se faire valoir*, which women always appreciate. They are utterly unable to comprehend modesty in men when they themselves are concerned, and do not quite despise the most harmless of

coxcombs as long as he only blows his trumpet loud and long enough.

The result of Alice's cogitations was that no answer should be sent to Lord Windermere, and that, at any rate for the present, and until Jack returned, he should not be admitted into North Street; and she took up her pen, and wrote a long letter to her husband, describing all she had done for the last week, with some most amusing details as to the "engagedness" of Emily Chillingham and the rector, but omitting all mention of the man who was in her thoughts. Jack, smoking his pipe in the Shodborough Inn, was struck by this omission, and supposed that Windermere had gone yachting, and then thought to himself what a good fellow his lordship was, and how lucky it was that Alice liked him, "for," said the sagacious Jack, "wives so seldom take to their husband's friends."

But Alice had reckoned without her host in supposing that it would be so easy for her to avoid the man with whose name all society was coupling hers.

That very night she met him at her father-in-law's in Eaton Square, and was sent in to dinner with him. It might have been awkward had not Windermere possessed as much tact as a Frenchwoman, and chatted pleasantly about the different topics of the day with the most perfect unconsciousness; and at last Alice plucked up her courage, and soon found herself conversing as easily and gaily with her neighbour as if she had not a few hours before been vowing by all her gods she would never speak with him more.

Flittery, just returned from Shodborough, was on the other side of her, and she happened to catch some words between him and Lady Brocklesby which caused her to prick up her ears.

"You'll never make me believe it of Jack," said Lady Brocklesby, shaking her head resolutely. "I don't believe he'd have the courage to speak to an actress—at any rate not during an election. And is she so very pretty off the stage?"

"Violet V.," said Flittery, in a judicial tone, "is about as pretty a little thing as you could find anywhere. Prettier off than on the stage I should say."

"Of course her character——"

"The less said about that the better," said Flittery, looking horribly knowing. "You know old Glorme is—but," and here he lowered his voice and leant across the table, "I think our friend Jack has——" The rest was inaudible.

"What's that about Jack?" asked Alice, in her clear voice.

"Oh nothing," said her ladyship, sportively. "Only that Jack, in the interval of politics, is studying the drama, and with a very good instructor."

"And who may that be?"

"Oh, no, Alice dear, we mustn't say; that *would* be telling tales out of school."

"But what is it all about?—what is Jack doing?" asked Alice, with a touch of asperity in her tone.

"Only giving little suppers to Miss Violet Vandeleur," said Lady Brocklesby, rather too eagerly, and with difficulty keeping up the sportive tone in which she had commenced. "A terrible scandal, isn't it, dearest? But we have *our* little suppers, too," and she glanced at Windermere.

"Suppers! little suppers!" exclaimed Lord Brocklesby from the other end of the table; "the very worst things in in the world. I remember poor Harry Coulton, who shot himself after supper at Crockford's. Everyone said that his depression of mind was caused much more by the lobster salad than the loss of money; and he *had* lost a cracker! Now, I come to think of it, though, I'm not sure it *was* after supper he did it, as I remember hearing the news just as I was going from White's down to the House of Commons, and that would have been too early. Stop a bit—no, it couldn't have been White's, because——"

But Alice could not wait for the end of these reminiscences.

"What fun for Jack!" she said, laughing, yet rather constrainedly. "I'm so glad he has something better to amuse him than snuffy Mr. Horton, and the horrid, greasy electors, who are always making him make disagreeable promises. And so Miss Violet—what's her other name?—is pretty, is she?"

"Oh, lovely," said Flittery, carelessly; "and they say—of course I know her very little; I've rather a dislike to that sort of thing myself—that she is very attractive, better educated than most, and full of sentiment and that sort of thing."

"How nice! I've always wanted to know an actress."

"You'll soon have an opportunity then, my love," said Lady Brocklesby, rather dryly.

"No, no!" shouted his lordship, who had caught the last words. "Don't you do it, Alice. Never you let Jack get among those people. It's like drinking opium, or any other bad but attractive habit. Such freedom, such fun! Why, I recollect the day when I lived, as it were, behind the scenes, and when——"

"I don't think we need have your experience," said her ladyship, snappishly; "and they wouldn't apply here, for Jack has, I should suppose, no intention of living like you, behind the scenes."

"Oh, I wasn't married then!" said Lord Brocklesby, with a sigh.

Alice had the fullest confidence in her husband, and yet she felt rather disquieted and inclined to be jealous. She remembered the kiss she had received—she who was so devoted to Jack—and felt that temptation is not always too easily overcome.

However, Jack was to be back next day, and it would go hard if she could not speedily efface from his mind the recollection of even the loveliest actress that ever wreathed a painted face in smiles.

Lady Brocklesby was very sympathetic in the drawing-room when the ladies were alone.

"You mustn't mind, darling," she said, pressing Alice's unresponding hand, "little things of this sort."

"What sort?" asked Alice, rather defiantly, and her eyes looking fierce.

"Well, well, if Jack is foolish, my dear, you see he is very young—and—actresses are very taking to young men. Besides, in these days, dear me! one scarcely knows what is wrong and what is right: even the *best people* do such odd things. By-the-bye, how very much changed Lord Windermere is! He used to be so very general in his attentions—a male bee, getting honey everywhere; and now they say he is no fun at all, and his best friends declare him almost a bore—so gloomy and preoccupied."

"What makes you talk of Jack and this actress in such a way?" asked Alice, suddenly. "How could he help meeting her at Shodborough? Don't you suppose he is able to speak to a woman without falling in love with her?"

"Of course, my dear," and Lady Brocklesby smiled pityingly. "Of course, people do exaggerate and are often most ill-natured. There may be nothing in it, and even if there is, you couldn't expect to be different to all the young married women; and it makes not much difference whether it comes sooner or later."

"I hate hearing you talk like that, Lady Brocklesby!" exclaimed Alice, with unnecessary vehemence. "I don't believe the world even here is as bad as you would make it out. I don't a bit see why two people who—who love one another should ever drift apart, as you hint they must."

"I don't see why they should; I only know they generally do. Ah, my dear Alice," and her ladyship sighed deeply, "when you have lived as long as I have, you will know what I know—that it is only for children and poets that such words as love and constancy have any meaning."

"Well, if one can't remain a child, one may try to be a poet."

The men entered at this moment.

"Alice is wishing to be a poet," said Lady Brocklesby, as Windermere approached them.

"Women—pretty women—are poetry itself," said he gallantly, scarcely glancing at Alice's red cheeks.

"Ah!" said Lord Brocklesby, "not so bad; but nothing to what we used to say in our young days. Now a young man puts his feet up on a sofa and tells a lady to ring the bell: and as to saying a pretty thing or turning a neat compliment, they can go no farther than the poke in the ribs or slap on the back, which used to be reserved for the love-making of bargees and farm labourers."

"Bravo, my lord!" cried Flittery, examining his dapper shoes. "But I hope we are not *all* of us quite bears."

"No," said his lordship, who hated Flittery because my lady liked him, "some of you are asses."

Windermere kept studiously away from Alice during the rest of the evening, and commenced in the distance a bantering flirtation with Jane, which that young lady received with far greater gratitude than it merited, and, almost alarmed by her good luck, cast anxious glances from time to time across the room to see how her sister-in-law "took it." She was somewhat disconcerted, however, by the abruptness with which the young lord's manner changed, and became *distrait* and cold; and the indifference with which he wished her good-night, having, he said, to attend "the House," nearly caused her to cry from disappointment.

There seemed something very eccentric in the manner of driving adopted by Alice's job-coachman that night as he started from Eaton Square. He was alone on the box, and Alice was terrified at seeing him roll to and fro before they had gone many yards, and show unmistakable signs of being almost helplessly drunk.

Bang! they went up against a lamp-post. The shock

caused the man to drop the reins. The horse, albeit usually of a mild disposition, was so surprised at finding himself free with the reins at his heels that he speedily broke into a canter shaved a cart by an inch in Grosvenor Gardens, whirled the carriage round the corner of Arabella Row with such violence as to threaten an upset, and before they reached Buckingham Palace Road was going at a good hand gallop, with Alice too frightened to scream or even to faint, and too wise to jump out, huddled up in a corner with her hands clasped, while the coachman held on to the side-rails, and, with his eyes shut, muttered mingled prayers and curses.

"Hollo!" cried a young gentleman in evening dress, and accompanied by a large cigar, who was crossing at the corner of the Palace. "A runaway! By gad! some one must stop them!"

Waving his arms and shouting, he checked the career of the frightened horse, and seizing him by the bit brought him to a halt, at the expense only of a broken hat, a fall on his knees, and the consequent damaging of his black trousers.

"There's no harm done," he said, looking into the brougham. "By Jove! Mrs. Chillingham! How lucky! With your permission I'll remove this gentleman and take his place."

Suiting the action to the word, he took the coachman, who struggled feebly, by the collar, and deposited him in the road, amid the grinning crowd. Then, taking the bedraggled reins, he drove rapidly off.

"I hope you haven't been much frightened," said he, as Alice got out at her own door. "Good-night. I think I know your stables, and will take the carriage there;" and lifting his battered and muddy hat with distant respect, Lord Windermere drove away, leaving Alice, agitated by very mixed feelings, on the doorstep.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Il n'y a point d'accident si malheureux dont les habiles gens ne tirent quelque avantage; ni si heureux que les imprudents ne puissent tourner à leur préjudice.

LA ROCHEFOUCAULD.

"AND so you don't care for your profession?"

"How can I? Don't you see what it is? It's all very well to talk bosh about holding the mirror up to nature, and the stage being one of the great what-d'ye-call-'ms of the age, and that sort of thing; but it isn't, you know. Of course, when a fellow puts on black clothes and plays Hamlet or Othello, he may be a great man; or when a woman lets down her back hair and looks gloomy, and makes the pit cry, she may be an artist, and all that; I can't say much about that branch. But I'm sure that when a woman kicks her legs about and speaks bad lines with worse puns, and winks at the young men in the boxes, and—well, you know what I mean—I'm quite sure *that's* not art, and when I'm called an *artiste* in the papers it amuses me."

"But why don't you change and do something else, then?"

"My dear boy," Violet Vandeleur assumed an air of protection with regard to Jack that rather amused him, "you ask silly questions. Ah!"—and she sighed—"I wish I could change a good many things; myself most of all."

"And yet most girls in the class you come from are envying you?" said Jack, to whom she had confided her history, or as much of it as she liked to tell.

"Do they? I suppose so. How little they know! The triumphs of a burlesque actress! I declare sometimes, Chillingham, that I could spit in the faces of the

grinning stalls for being such fools as to like the trash I am saying or singing. And then the gloating old fellows with opera-glasses, and young men from Aldershot, who wait outside the stage-door and who send me notes, and bouquets, and presents through the door-keeper. Triumphs! Every moment of the life of such as I am is a fresh insult—all the worse because one can't—one hasn't the smallest right to resent it. If I could only ——" and the little hand was clenched and the white teeth set resolutely.

"Could only what?"

"Get away from it all—from the life, and everything," she said, glancing almost imperceptibly at the door through which Sir John Glorme might be expected shortly to enter; "sometimes to meet a good woman, or a man who did't think one was only made for his amusement, and nothing else. I declare, Chillingham"—and she raised her earnest black eyes to his—"I declare I don't believe they think actresses have any souls; they think they are all paint and legs and jokes—and shame." She said the last word half to herself, and with a slight shudder.

"You said you longed sometimes to meet a good woman. I am sure you would like my wife."

"Your wife!" cried she, holding up her little hands in horror, half real, half mocking. "Me meet the Honourable Mrs. Chillingham!—me, Violet V., the incomparable dancer of *cancans!*"

"I don't see," began Jack, annoyed; but she touched him gently on the shoulder, and interrupted him.

"You're a good fellow, Chillingham—I very nearly called you Jack—but you don't know even your own world. You don't know quite what I am, and how awfully wide is the ditch between ladies in society and—no-ladies out of it."

"But you don't know," said Jack, hastily, "how different my wife is to the people you hear about. She isn't a

fine lady a bit, and I know she would like to talk to you, and perhaps might be able to comfort you a bit when you feel low, like to-day."

"God bless my soul, child! Why, the touch of the hem of my frock is contamination. Don't you know that my disease is catching?"

She had lost her softness now, and said this with a bold, mocking glance, which put to flight the sentimental speech which trembled on Jack's lips, as indeed she intended it should.

"I suppose you're the best judge," he said rather huffily.

"Of course I am, and when you come to my age——"

"Why, I'm two or three years older than you, Miss Vandeleur!"

"You forget *how* I have lived," she said, the mockery giving place to a sad, far-away look. "I've packed twenty years into four, I think. But why *must* we talk of me?—it's a subject I detest."

"Then you are alone in that opinion," said Jack, gallantly; but she did not reply.

"Chillingham!" she said suddenly, after a pause, during which he had wondered what it was that made her so much more attractive than most women of her class, "you're a good fellow. I should say you were the only man in England who would speak to *me* of his wife. You are one of very few who speak to me as if I were a fellow-creature at all, and not always only a toy to play with and despise. You make me feel more human—as if there was some softness left. Tell me of yourself and *her*, your wife. Is she pretty?"

"Lovely," said Jack, enthusiastically, recalling the smile in Alice's mouth and eyes as she bade him farewell. "And as good as she is pretty. You can't have any idea how——" He stopped suddenly, remembering some vague wisdom about not praising one woman to another.

"I can have no idea of a good woman, you mean," said Violet, rather defiantly.

"Oh no! I didn't—indeed I didn't. I was going to say I was sure Alice had no uncharitableness in her. I wish you would let me tell her about you. She would delight in seeing you. May I?"

"Go and ask one of your fine friends that question," said Violet, scornfully. "Or, rather, take care not to, lest you find yourself in a lunatic asylum."

At this point Sir John Glorme entered, his brow a little clouding as he saw Jack still in Violet's company; for the worthy baronet did not quite rise—cynic by profession as he was—above the vulgar weakness of jealousy; and Jack was soon called away on electoral business not of the pleasantest nature. Mr. Hopgoal, the bright light of the Republican party, had suddenly issued an address, dated from the Goat and Horns; and poor Mr. Horton, who was naturally of a desponding frame of mind, was in agonies. The Duke of Cheshire, although generous in large matters, was somewhat too fond of justice in the abstract, and a little too intolerant of vulgarity and flattery, to be very popular with the multitude, and there had grown up, with the ballot and other atrocities, a general though scarcely expressed opinion in the town that it would be rather a fine thing to show some independence at last, and vote against the FitzCrewe influence.

A leader only was wanted, and Mr. Hopgoal, a thorough Shodborough man, connected by birth with half of the best tradesmen, brought up at the Shodborough school and speaking with the Shodborough accent—for Shodborough prided itself on the purity of its tongue, and its superiority in this respect to London—was the very man. The Dissenting interest would go with him, for the Duke, although he never entered a church himself, and when he could be induced to mention religious matters, gave utterance to a kind of mild and easy-going materialism, or, we might say, atheism without a backbone, which shocked

good people, was a sturdy supporter of the Establishment. The Irish party, too, would vote for Hopgoal, as he seemed inclined to break somebody's head. Altogether, Jack's prospects had darkened very much, and the meetings of the committee at The FitzCrewe Arms quite lost the comfortable glass-of-liquor-and-chaff air which they had assumed before the Hopgoal address appeared. It was true that the advanced Liberal party had always threatened an opposition, but Mr. Horton had counted on their candidate being old Mr. Mealey, of Mealey Park, whose views were gentle, whose chances were small, and who had too wholesome an awe of the great house of FitzCrewe to make a very desperate battle of it.

In the intervals of promising and vowing, and buttering and cajoling, Jack, however, found time to write a letter to his wife, explaining that he was kept at Shodborough by unexpected circumstances, and going on to tell her of Violet, and the interest she had excited in him.

"You could not help liking her," he wrote. "She is so pretty, and so sorry for herself, and ashamed of her life, and queer altogether. Poor girl! she says she has no friends, no *good* woman to whom she can even speak; and I told her I knew you were enough above prejudice to be kind to her, and to see her sometimes. She is not a bit what one would suppose; and really, when she told me her history, which I will tell you when we meet, I felt as if she had behaved in her life rather better than one could have expected. I believe she has an engagement in London soon, and I look forward to seeing my darling wife doing an unfortunate girl a real kindness, maybe saving her—who knows?—from her present life."

It was perhaps unfortunate that this letter was put into Alice's hands just after Lord Windermere had, as she thought, saved her life at the risk of his own.

Fate seems very blundering in its arrangements sometimes.

CHAPTER XIX.

Thus from your presence forth I go,
A lost and lonely man;
Reckless alike of weal or woe,
Heaven's benison or ban.
He who has known the tempest's worst
May bare him to the blast.
Blame not these tears—they are the first;
Are they the last?

PRAED.

IT is no doubt a nice thing to have your life saved, but a good deal depends on its being done by the right person. Alice, reflecting over her adventure, was inclined to think sometimes that it would have been better that she should be a mangled corpse than that Lord Windermere should have prevented that consummation. "Is it fate," she thought, "that seems to deny me the power of avoiding him, and throws all these opportunities in his way?" When people begin to talk of Fate they are generally in a bad way; for a scapegoat is never looked for until there is at least reasonable cause for believing that he may be required.

Of course Windermere called next day "to inquire," and equally of course Alice could not deny herself to him under the circumstances. Indeed, it cannot confidently be affirmed that she wished to deny herself. That he was a hero to her she no longer attempted to conceal from herself; but, good gracious! there are plenty of heroes about, and there was no reason she should care for this one man more than any other.

"Yes," he said, after her somewhat incoherent gratitude had been expressed, "yes, it *was* lucky your horse was stopped in time; but as to danger—there was no danger to me!—or difficulty; why, any other fellow in the street

would have done the same in a second, only I happened to be nearest to the brute's head."

"Why you were knocked down and dragged on your knees, and you tore your clothes, and spoiled your hat—and——"

"Very serious damage! I *did* do it rather clumsily, and it's not kind of you to remind me of the fact. There was a butcher just behind me when I stopped you who would have done it with one arm."

"I don't believe any butcher would have done it," said Alice, rather indignantly; "and I insist on being grateful to you, Lord Windermere, whatever you may say."

"Gratitude is better than dislike, at any rate," said he, looking into her eyes; "and I was afraid yesterday that you hated me. You ought to forgive what I did, because——"

"Oh, I don't want to talk of it," cried Alice. "We've forgotten all about it,"

"You may have," he said slowly, and half to himself. "Ah! I wish *I* could!"

Alice affected not to hear, and seemed much interested by something in the street.

"Jack's coming back directly," she said at last, after a long pause—a dangerous pause—a pause in which each thought of the secret between them—the fatal kiss.

"Is he?" said Windermere, starting. "So soon?"

"Soon! he's been away nearly three weeks."

"And it has passed like three hours. I wonder if I have ever been so happy before."

"Happy! You rich men are always happy, are you not?" Alice tried hard to be playful, but scarcely succeeded.

"Are we? Do you know, Mrs. Chillingham, that I have, within three weeks, found out a great truth."

"And what may that be?" asked Alice, looking rather uncomfortable.

"I have found out that what I called pleasure and

what I called pain up to this year, were not pleasure and pain at all. They were only miserable counterfeits; shams. I know the real thing now—both sensations—and they have revealed themselves to me together."

"I don't quite see," said Alice, still interested in the street, and only showing him her exquisite profile as she gazed intently out of the window; the while an Italian organ-man, desperately sanguine, grinned, and nodded, and bowed to her over his instrument. "I don't quite see how anyone can feel pleasure and pain together."

"Don't you? Have you ever been in love?"

Alice looked round for a moment, and then quickly resumed her unconscious tantalising of the Italian.

"What a question, Lord Windermere!" she said, as lightly as she could. "I thought you said the other day that love had been *civilized* out of modern society, and was only left in the village ale-shop, or among the hop-pickers."

"Did I say so? I was a fool. I never knew what love was till the other day; and then, when I found out that the poets are not liars, that no amount of veneering and sham civilization can kill the feeling which I now know is the mark of our superiority to the animals—a feeling which seems to be heaven and hell together—I also found out what is the meaning of those sad words, "too late!"

"You are very sentimental this morning," said Alice, constrainedly, "and moralise like Mr. Keyser."

"Do I?" he sighed gently, and looked, for Alice glanced round for a moment, very handsome, as the sun just touched upon his curly fair hair. "Well, I shan't bore you much more at any rate. I'm going to India next week."

India! It seemed a long way off; and there were tigers and shipwrecks, and he had just saved her life. Surely these were the only reasons why she felt sick and faint as he said the words, and why her little hands

grasped the bars of the window so tightly. The Italian was getting tired of smiling, and began to think the pretty lady in the window, for all her prettiness, was a miser. India! Why, people went to India every day; it was no journey at all now, they said. Besides, he was nothing to her, this fair-haired man, with the soft smile and stern eyes. Jack—Jack! She only cared for Jack; and he was fooling away the time he might have saved her from all this— bother, with an actress—a pretty, a fascinating actress, whom he wished, oh infamy! to introduce to herself.

But she only said, calmly:

"To India! I didn't know you cared about travelling."

"Nor do I."

"Then why—why do you go?"

"Because I cannot stay at home; because I dare not be near—dare not be in England, I mean. If I stayed, I should go mad. I am glad"—here he rose and came to her, as if to say good-bye—"that Jack is coming back at once. I know he is very fond of you, but ill-natured people will say ill-natured things, you know, and it's hard upon a poor little woman to be left all alone like this."

Somehow his imminent departure for India seemed to excuse the familiarity of speech.

"I want you to look upon me as your friend always," he said, holding her hand, "and——" He stopped, seeming unable to say more.

Alice's little hand trembled in his, but she apparently forgot to remove it; and then they two stood while you might have counted a score, and the organ-man departed in utter disgust to play elsewhere.

"When do you go?" she said at last, gently.

"I go to-morrow; that is, I go to get things ready, and shall not come back to town again."

"And must you?"

"Unless you tell me to stay."

Alice was silent. The battle within her was too strong for words. In the last ten minutes she had—as the man beside her said that he had—found out a great, a terrible truth. She had discovered that there were depths in her nature which had not been stirred till now. She could no longer deceive herself. She loved Jack—she knew she loved him, as dearly now as the day when she stood encircled by his arms on the deck of the good ship *Scotia;* but this new feeling that had sprung up and seemed to tear her very heart—it was far different. It was horrible—it was delicious. It frightened her—it enchanted her. Whatever it was, she felt born to be its slave. Was this indeed Alice Chillingham standing by the window? That person seemed to have died, and with her her innocence, her soft likings which she called love, and, alas! her happiness. She was no hypocrite to herself, and as she looked up into Windermere's eyes she felt that all her being had gone out to him; that, come what might, strive as she would, she was a guilty woman at heart. But she would fight undauntedly to the end.

"What have my wishes to do with it?" she said, taking her hand from his.

"I don't know, only that I have no laws now but them——"

Another of those deadly pauses, so much more eloquent than any words.

"You—you will come back soon?" She was tearing a rose to pieces, and its petals fell at Windermere's feet.

"No!" he said fiercely. Then, stooping and picking up the remainder of the rose which had dropped from her hands, "Forgive me. I shall come back—when I can bear to——"

"To do what?"

Womanlike she hurried on what she would fain have averted. No woman ever truly prays to be kept from

temptation. She wishes for the temptation, that she may —overcome it.

"To see you, Alice! Will you not let me look into your sweet eyes once more before I go?"

See looked up again.

"You ought not to speak like that!"

"*Ought* not!" he echoed, bitterly. "No, of course, I ought not. It is so easy for you, happy with your husband and all you love, to say that to a miserable devil whose life is a hell to him, just because he *ought not.* Don't mind what I say, Mrs. Chillingham—I am half mad; but it is your fault. We shall not meet again for years. When I come back all will be altered. Though I can never forget what I feel for you, I shall be able, at least, to bear it with composure. Now—but I am tiring you—good bye."

He held out his hand, but she seemed not to see it.

"Do you think it is you, and you only, who have things to bear?" she said gently, looking him wistfully in the face. "Did it ever strike you that to force yourself to do your duty is sometimes as hard a fate as to be forced by others to do it? You men are very proud of your capabilities of devotion and self-sacrifice when you love; but will you ever sacrifice the love itself?"

"Oh Alice!" cried Windermere, suddenly interrupting her. He had read her secret—his success—in her wistful eyes. "Do not send me away! Tell me to stay! I cannot tear out my heart! Do not be mad, and make yourself miserable for a wretched prejudice!"

His arm was half round her waist; his face close to hers. The battle seemed all but over.

"No, no! You have no right to think I meant—I—— You must leave me now—I am not well."

Her white cheeks and trembling lips testified to the truth of this.

"And I may come again?"

"No—I implore you—go! I may be weak—wicked, but I have strength enough left to tell you this: that never willingly will I see you again."

"And I must go—to India?"

"As you please."

Alice's tone was cold, but her heart was beating so fiercely that she feared he would hear it.

"You mean this?" asked he, softly.

"Cannot you see," she cried, "that you are torturing me?"

"Forgive me, Alice—I may call you Alice once more? Good-bye—good-bye."

He bent over her hand; his lips touched it. He was gone.

The closing of the street-door awoke Alice from an apparent reverie.

"My God!" she said in her heart, an expression of startled horror on her face. "Forgive me! But I love him—I love him!"

CHAPTER XX.

Alas ! the love of women ! it is known
To be a lovely and a fearful thing :
For all of theirs upon that die is thrown,
And if 'tis lost life hath no more to bring
To them but mockeries of the past alone.

BYRON.

LADY MELDRUM concealed, under all her oddities and vulgarities, a good heart; and she had never been able to cultivate up to the required pitch the art of destroying characters and taking pleasure in hearing them destroyed. She could say a rude thing with infinite *gusto;* but she bore no malice if the repartee was galling; and she obstinately refused to believe in the absolute decay of morals which is supposed to have set in nowadays. Alice's face and freshness had charmed her, and her indignation at the stories now openly told of that young lady knew no bounds.

"It's just like you all!" she said. "Just because she's prettier, and nicer, and more innocent than any of us, you can't allow her even the mildest of virtues. Why, you've only got to look at her and hear her talk to know these tales are false—as false as Flittery's smile."

Flittery was at once her friend and her detestation. She despised him thoroughly, and never lost an opportunity of showing it, but he fetched and carried very well, always knew what was going on, was *tant soit peu* ornamental, well connected, and altogether an admirable tame cat.

"Well, all that I can say is——," said this gentleman, not noticing the reference to himself.

She interrupted him. "Whenever Flittery is going to

be terrific in his spite he says, 'It's all he can say.' Now for it!"

"Well, Windy is never out of the house; and Mr. C. *is* very often out of it—and—well, well, time will show."

Badsworth, who was standing close by in conversation with some other men, grew very pale and bit his lips, but said nothing.

"At all events," said Lady Meldrum, "we might as well have the story. I hate hints and innuendoes."

"The story is a simple one, and not a bit surprising to anyone who has had their eyes open lately. Coming back from Richmond last Sunday with his coach, who should Charley Heyward meet going there—it was evening—but Windermere in his phaeton, and with him a lady in a veil; but who was easily recognised as——"

"As who?" asked Badsworth, eagerly.

Flittery glanced at his face with a covert smile.

"Why, Mrs. Chillingham, of course."

"I don't believe a word of it."

"There is no reason why you should," said Flittery turning away.

Then Badsworth went to his sister, to whom he had got into the habit of confiding his griefs and joys.

She was a bright little thing, a painting by Watteau—this Lady Eleanor Stonegrave. Artistic, sentimental, mirth-loving, firmly believing in good was she, and patrician to her dainty finger-ends. Her little head was full of what she called—her pouting lips almost refusing to bring out the big words—the amelioration of the masses; but the practicability of her schemes was not much superior to that of the French queen, who could not understand why the people should be silly enough to starve when they could buy such charming *brioches* at two sous apiece. Life was, as she intended it to be, very picturesque to her, and as she had not yet met any man endowed with a sufficiency of this quality—picturesqueness—she

had hitherto refused all offers, and preferred to remain Lady Eleanor Stonegrave.

"But what can I do, dear?" she said, when her brother had finished his recital.

"I'm sure I don't know—except—couldn't you warn her how people are talking? Of course, I know how good and innocent she really is, and so do you."

Lady Eleanor shook her head softly.

"Yes, you do. You needn't shake your head, Nell—you *must*. But you see she doesn't know London, or what brutes people are. And Windermere is such a cunning brute."

"I don't see how I could interfere," said Lady Eleanor. "She'd think it great presumption in an unmarried girl; and besides, dear, do you know, I don't much like going to North Street. If Lord Windermere isn't there, that odious Mrs. Belfort is sure to be."

"How like a woman! Because poor little Mr. Belfort doesn't happen to be in your 'set' she is perforce odious."

"How like a man! Because a woman is pretty, no matter what else she is, she is 'poor little Mrs. So-and-so' at once. But, surely, Lady Brocklesby hears things about her daughter-in-law! She is not a woman people are shy of talking before; and I've seen her watching Mrs. Chillingham when she's been talking to Lord Windermere, in a very peculiar manner."

"Confound her!" cried Badsworth. "I believe she has some reason for wanting mischief to be made between Jack and his wife. What an ass that fellow is, to be sure."

At the time this speech was made, the ass in question was shouting himself hoarse upon the hustings, making prodigious points, audible only to the reporter, and in which "the British Constitution" seemed to play a prominent part.

But it was all of no use. The rebel spirit in Shod-

borough flamed out fiercely at last, and at the close of the poll the numbers stood:

Hopgoal	927
Chillingham...	873

"It was all that —— actress!" muttered poor, perspiring Mr. Horton, as he stood in the balcony of The Fitz-Crewe Arms, and saw the crowd melt away which had been listening to Jack's valedictory oration, to which he had with great effort succeeded in imparting a better-luck-next-time air.

"It was all that d——d actress! It must have lost us at least one hundred votes of the Low Church people, that seeing him gallivanting about the streets with her."

Windermere did not go to India after all. He came again to North Street for one more farewell, and Alice hating herself for the weakness—asked him to stay in England.

She attempted to throw a sop to her conscience by saying "Not at home" to him twice the next day, and with feminine inconsequence allowed him to take her a drive into the country the day after.

She scarcely yet realized the full meaning of what she had done, of the change which had taken place in her. She knew Jack was coming back immediately, and she shuddered at her ingratitude, at her wickedness in not being delighted, as a short week ago she would have been. And yet, alas! she was very happy—happy with a wild, passionate enjoyment that she had never felt before.

With some women it is far greater pleasure to love than to be loved.

Alice never asked herself whether she was not giving her all, and receiving nothing in exchange.

Her "faith, unfaithful, made her falsely true."

Windermere, however, was not aware of the fulness of his triumph. He did know her well enough to be aware that she was not like the dozen or so of other women who

had listened with downcast eyes and fluttering bosoms to his soft words. That she was compromised, was enough for him. That was *the* great barrier to be crossed, and the rest was easy. Her fits of coldness, her impatient rejection of the smallest caress, her indignation even at his calling her by her Christian-name, he looked upon as so many feints to draw out the commencement of the *liaison* as much as possible. That success was in his grasp he doubted not at all, and he would not have objected to what he considered her affected prudery, had it been May instead of August, or were his yacht not awaiting him in Cowes Roads.

Little knew he of the fierce battle between passion and duty that raged within Alice's heart. Little knew he of the ridiculous pedestal upon which that young woman had placed him. Had he dreamed of all this, he would probably have retired alarmed; for, as he had often said at the club, "there is nothing so disagreeable as to have a woman too seriously in love with one." Whether this speech did much to reassure the suspicious and pitiable husbands who overheard it is, perhaps, doubtful.

For the first time since they met in America, Alice met Jack's honest look of admiration and rapturous embrace with embarrassment. For the first time she felt that she was acting when, in answer to his fond questions, she avowed anew her affection for him. And yet she did love him—in a way.

It was simply that till the other day she had not known what passionate love was; she had mistaken the calm happiness with which she accepted Jack's homage and protection for a far different feeling.

As she lay down to sleep that night, her strongest sentiment was intense pity for herself, and a vague anger with Fate for having so deceived and tricked her.

On one thing she was sternly resolved. Lord Windermere, Jack, no one, should ever know the fiery ordeal she had gone through. She would do her duty to her hus-

band just as if no such person as the young lord existed. She would cut this guilty passion out of her heart. Not at once—that she knew to be impossible—but by degrees. She would force herself henceforward to be contented with such happiness as an unsatisfied heart could afford. Her life would be incomplete ; she would be another of those human beings who have just missed their destinies, and have themselves made this world nothing but a stony path along which to hurry, when it might have been a garden of lovely flowers, wherein to linger is pleasant.

Jack's delight at returning, stung her to the quick. She thought of Judas as she returned his kisses. She almost longed to confess all, and throw herself upon his pity ; and—it must be confessed that she had not had quite time yet to pick up all the ways of society—she fell on her knees, and, while thanking Heaven, with charming inconsequence, for having brought her into this sweet temptation, prayed eagerly that she might be given strength to overcome the same.

And Jack, ere he went to sleep, thought to himself that his defeat at Shodborough, his poverty, and the pile of disagreeable missives which awaited his return, were amply compensated for by the pure love of his beautiful wife.

CHAPTER XXI.

Desipere est mortale eterno jungere et unâ
Consentire putare, et fungi mutua posse.

LUCRETIUS.

ARMADO.—Adieu, valour ! rust, rapier ! be still, drum ! for your manager is in love : yea, he loveth. Assist me, some extemporal god of rhyme, for I am sure I shall turn sonnetteer.

Love's Labour's Lost

THE "season" flickered—flamed up at one or two desperate gaieties, by means of which lovers of London tried to obtain momentary oblivion of the long boredom now approaching—and finally went out amid the champagne and heat of Goodwood and the calmer joys of Cowes.

Like every other season it has been a "very bad one:" the tradesmen had despaired, and made their cent. per cent.; the lucky proprietor of park chairs had amassed a fortune in coppers, but had grumbled at the averseness to seating themselves shown by some few spring captains; the linkmen apparently existing in a perpetual state of hoarseness and semi-intoxication, had returned to the mysterious bourne from whence they should emerge when the swallows again came back and told us it was summer; cross mammas and triumphant if perspiring papas conveyed their charges—less fair, less blooming, than a few short months ago, and with the weight of one more lost opportunity upon their shoulders—away to the green pastures of home; the tailors were beseiged by anxious dandies who had put off ordering their yachting or other rural clothes to the last; the doctors were sending their patients to German baths, and were themselves arranging their holiday tours: and the thorough London fogies were congratulating themselves as the clubs gradually emptied, and it was no longer necessary to sit upon the last editions

of the papers in order to make certain of retaining them, or to hide the amusing novels under sofa cushions.

The bursting of the bubble of a London season has something melancholy in it, and might indeed be made the theme of several pages of moralising had we not to attend to our story, and to develop as far as in us lies the ulterior destiny of Alice Chillingham.

It is so much the fashion among novelists to take liberties with the post-bag, that we offer no apology to our readers for laying before them the following letters:

No. 1. From Lady ELEANOR STONEGRAVE, at Hollingly Hall, Cheshire, to Lord BADSWORTH, St. James Place, London.

"MY POOR DEAR FRANK,

"Fancy your being kept stewing in London in this weather and with no one to speak to except the policemen and milkmaids! I declare I think the army ought to be broken up—or at least the guards ought—when the season is over. Who on earth is there left in town worth guarding, I should like to know? So you want me tell you all about our party here. I think I can guess the reason, and am very angry with you, and shall tell you nothing, except that we are all very cheery and lazy, and the lawn-tennis ground is perfect, and the place beautiful in its way; I don't care much for the *style*. But the Duke is a Goth, and says Morris and Co. are —well, he says a very rude thing about them, and always laughs when I try to talk of high art. I suppose some people, even sensible ones, have that sense wanting which teaches us that there can be poetry in the leg of a sideboard, and a symphony in a kettle-holder. Æsthetic perception is—but I wont give you a high art lecture, for I half suspect you are rather devoid of the sense I men-

tioned. The party here is not very large. It consists of Mrs. Jellaby, who dresses in exquisite taste, and manages to talk to every body about things they like, as if she thoroughly understood each subject, and makes eyes at the Duke, who laughs at her behind her back, and is charmed by her. Then, of course—how wicked we are nowadays, to be sure ?—of course there is Charlie Holster, with very high collars, and much shirt-sleeve and bad manners, but cheery and pleasant in a way too, and devoted to Mrs. J.; Mr. Keyser, who moralises at breakfast, which is a crime worthy of hanging, and who *will* try and talk about art to me. Do you know, dear, that I half believe—but, no; you will only say I am conceited; all the same, I *do* think something. Mr. Tollebens—I beg his pardon, Sir Marmaduke Tollebens, Bart—a snuffy old gentleman, isn't he ? but full of intelligence, till after dinner, when I fear he is generally rather too full of his grace's '48. They took him to bed last night after he had twice evolved a chair out of his inner consciousness, and therefore had twice sat down rather painfully on the floor. Another baronet—that dreadful Sir John Glorme. I *cannot* understand why the Duke should have asked him here. One never breathes quite freely while he is in the room, and there is something in his blood-shot eyes which haunts me. We are, however, spared one infliction—Lady G. is not here. Johnny Beere, who is, as he himself says, in tiptop form, keeps us all alive, though how he manages such high spirits the first thing in the morning, when I hear he is the last to leave the smoking-room, is wonderful. He and some of the younger men pulled Mr. Keyser out of the bed the other night, and Mr. Keyser tries to cut him, but he won't be cut, and it is amusing, though, perhaps, rather a shame. I think on the whole practical joking is vulgar, and Mr. Keyser takes it very well, considering. Lady Meldrum is here, quite splendid, ridiculously overdressed, and a terror to

the poor Duke, whose secretary must, I think, have invited her out of contrariety.

"Then there are a lot of inferior FitzCrewes—cousins and nephews, and others; nearly all nice-looking, and all ready to black the Duke's boots, which boots, by-the-bye, are rather large just now, as his grace has a touch of gout and isn't in the best of tempers.

"Let me see—is that all? No. There's Mr. Flittery, who's amusing, and the best *raconteur* I know—good-looking, too; and the Chillinghams. Do you know, Frank dear, that I like her very much? Not a bit what I used to fancy her in London. I think she is melancholy; she is so gentle, and gives way to everyone in such a pretty way. What eyes she has! The Duke is hopelessly in love with her, and no wonder. I can scarcely imagine any man being near her for ten minutes without being hopelessly in love with her. *How* I wish she would sit to dear Mr. W—— as a 'symphony,' or an 'arrangement,' or something! But she scarcely seems to think herself pretty; indeed I think she is the only unconceited woman I ever saw. She has her pug and her husband with her. The pug—Goggles by name—is delicious, with its tongue hanging out of its mouth, and such a skin! The husband—well, I rather like him; but—I suppose it's something wrong in my nature—I never care about a man who is so palpably in love with his wife. Of course he ought to be, but I think he might manage to hide it. Between you and me, I fancy his devotion bores her just a little; but then too much devotion bores every woman. Mr. Keyser says that contempt is what a woman likes best; but I hope that is not quite true. I know I hate being despised. What a long stupid letter I've written! But it's your own fault. Make them give you leave as soon as you can, and come to Stonegrave. We'll have some acting; and if you're all very good *I'll* paint your scenery.—Your very affectionate sister,

"NELLY."

"P.S.—If you happen to be anywhere near Leicester Square soon, go to Lambert's shop, and pick me up something delicious and quaint in old silver, as a present for Emily Chillingham—something slightly ecclesiastical would be best.

"P.S. No. 2.—I forgot to say that Lord Windermere has accepted an invitation here, and comes the day after to-morrow. The Chillinghams at lunch suddenly announced their intention of going to-morrow, but they have been persuaded to stay another week."

Letter No. 2.—From ALICE CHILLINGHAM, at Hollingly Hall, to Mrs. BELFORT, Cowes, Isle of Wight.

"MY DEAREST MINNA,

"I really don't think that I have anything to tell you. Compared to your doings—dancing, yachting, and must I add, flirting?—we are as quiet as quakers. The Duke is charming, and we are fast friends—not *fast* in one sense, you understand. He is far nicer when you know him well; his indifference, cynicism, and selfishness are all put on, and if he were not a duke he would be perfect. You will have seen in *The Post* what our party is; I know you are a great reader of the fashionable intelligence, so I need say nothing about it. I was very much relieved not to find a *particular person*. You ought not to have written to me as you did, Minna. Supposing that what you said were true, or half true, would it not be a terrible thing for him, for me, for—for everyone? You know we can't all be like you, and turn everything serious into childish play. I envy you, dear, though I don't approve of you, and I can't possibly imitate you, and would not if I could. Jack is so good, and kind and nice; not a bit cross or put out at his disappointment about Parliament, where I am convinced he would have made a name. I

think the Duke likes him extremely, and I'm sure he ought to. . . .

"I had to stop writing, as the luncheon-gong sounded; and now, what do you think? The Duke has just announced that Lord Windermere comes on Friday. I've told you so much that I might as well tell you more, for I know you do not talk. I daren't meet him! It is too bad of the Duke to ask him—or, at any rate, it is too bad of him to accept; but we are going. I have persuaded Jack that I want to go to North Street to arrange my things before we let the house, and that I am dull here; and we shall go to-morrow. The Duke is furious; but I can't help that. Meet that man I will not at any price. You don't know how torn and miserable I am, dear; but never write to me as you did last. Consolation does not lie in that way.

"In haste,

"Yours ever,

"ALICE CHILLINGHAM.

"P. S.—After all the Duke has persuaded Jack to stay. Only forty-eight hours before he comes! That odious Mrs. Jellaby is full of her feeble wit, and she and Mr. Flittery are whispering in a corner and looking at me as I write. How I wish we had never come here!"

Letter No. 3.—From Lord WINDERMERE, the *Wraith*, R. Y. S., Plymouth, to Lieut.-Colonel HERBERT DERRINGER, Travellers' Club, London.

"MY DEAR HERBERT,

"Beastly weather, and rather lucky for you you didn't come. Thunderstorms and calms. I think I shall give up yachting. It's a snare and a delusion. Perhaps

a big steamer with a party of cheery fellows who would all play high, to go round the world in, might be fun. Certainly trying to win a race when there's not enough of wind to blow your flag out is damnation. I'm not sure you are not right in hanging on in town. I am not sure, indeed, that you are not right in everything. You have no ostensible means of livelihood, and yet you live better than I do. You haven't got a drop of the milk of human kindness in you, and you are the most popular fellow in London. You hate women, and they all dote on you. You never take the trouble to do more than walk down Pall Mall, and yet we all know you can shoot and ride better than any of us; and you profess never to open a book, or to know an inn-sign from a Raphael, while your friends are perfectly aware that you can write verses as witty as Hood's and as melodious as Tom Moore's, that you have read every work in English, French, German, and Italian worth reading, are a first-class classical scholar, and can paint at least as well as half the R.A's.

"You are an absurdity, that's the fact of it, and it amuses me this sweltering day, lying under my awning, with a pipe and a bottle of hock, to remind you of the fact.

"You want to know what I am doing. Well, I'm thinking of a pair of dark eyes. Not an unusual thing with me, eh? But this time I am not the victor musing on the field of battle, but the beaten general wondering how the deuce he made so many mistakes. Of course you know who I mean; even you must allow she is perfect. I made all sorts of promises to keep away, &c.—you see it *has* progressed—and I now intend deliberately to break them. If there'd been any wind at these confounded regattas, or if the *Wraith* had done better when we did have enough to move through the water with, it might have been different. But the ship is no good except when reefing is the order of the day, and I'm sick of the whole thing. So I send by this post an acceptance of old

Cheshire's invitation for next week at Hollingly, where *she* is to be.

"Despite your solemn assurance that another row of the old kind would be the last straw to break the camel's back of the toleration of society, I intend to have one more. Besides, I don't care a damn for society, and even if it did look black—which I don't believe it ever would on me (it only disapproves of those it can kick with impunity)—Alice's eyes are worth a bigger price than that.

"She puzzles me rather. Whether she is amusing herself or is really seriously *taken* I can't make out. Sometimes I think she is desperately in love with her husband—not that *that* even often stands in the way of a larky woman. Sometimes I believe she only flirts with me to be seen of men—and women; but oftenest it seems she is wretched and sentimental, and trying not to show me she cares for me.

"I wish you would go into society more, you old hermit, and then you might have given your valuable opinion. She has the most lovely hands and feet I ever saw. Lady Brocklesby is a curious woman. All the season her chief endeavour appeared to be to arrange that I should meet her daughter-in-law. Perhaps to some women match-unmaking comes as natural as match-making to others. But it struck me as odd and rather disgusting. Write and tell me the news occasionally; and if you have any sweet love ditties written in your hot youth, you might send them to me. It may be, according to Butler, that—

> 'She that by poetry is won
> Is but a desk to write upon,'

but I haven't found it so; only the poetry must be rather incomprehensible to have much effect.

"Yours, W."

Letter No. 4.—From Lieut-Colonel HERBERT DERRINGER, Travellers' Club, to Lord WINDERMERE, Hollingly Hall.

"MY DEAR WINDY,

"You're an ass, as I've told you a thousand times. The Divorce Court is as vulgar as Hampstead Heath now; and you look as well riding a whirligig on Margate Parade as running away with your friend's wife, in these practical days. The ridicule is all thrown on the Lothario, not the Benedict now,—on the *horner* and not on the *hornee*. They manage these things better in France; but we do not live in France. As to defying the opinion of people you live with, you talk like a boy of sixteen. You might just as well cut off your feet so as to walk without suffering from your corns. Of course, the opinion of your set is a nuisance; just as having your hair cut is a nuisance; but it must exist, and you must not let your tangled locks stream 'like a meteor to the troubled air.'

"However, 'Gang your ain gait.' I never trouble myself about other people's affairs. Only one thing—do not commit the common mistake of being a friend of the husband's. It is bad form. Just as I never tell a lie—not from principle, but because it is less trouble to speak the truth—so I have a reasonless, and utterly irrational perhaps, dislike to anything like deceit.

"I have burnt all my school-day verses, I think—at least I can lay my hands on none but these, which are almost too silly even for you to have written. However you are welcome to them.

"Yours ever,

"HERBERT DERRINGER."

As the enclosed verses did eventually reach Alice, who

thought them perfect, we may as well place them before the reader, on whom their perusal is not obligatory :

To ——

Oh, sweet eyes bathed in liquid blue !
  Oh, pouting rosy lips !
Oh, tiny ears of shell-like hue
  Oh, fairy finger-tips !

When to those lips my own I press,
  And when that little hand
Nestles in mine with shy caress,
  And—a magician wand—

Turns all my blood to sudden fire,
  And bids me leave our mirth
For the stern joys of fierce desire,
  Then heaven comes down to earth.

Then, as thy soft dishevelled hair
  Half hides but to adorn
The glory of those bright eyes, where
  A thousand Cupids mourn

That they are chained in heaven above,
  And cannot come to kiss
Thy lips, whose wealth of earthly love
  Exceeds all heavenly bliss ;

I pray for death, that ne'er again
  While beats my quickened heart,
Those words may come, so full of pain,
  " Oh darling, we must part ! "

To feel that as I die thou'lt press
  My eyes—all filled with thee—
With quivering lips, whose mournfulness
  Would make life sad to me,

Were joy indeed ; and I could then
  A happy conqueror die,
For aye to pity other men
  Who live so lovelessly.

But no ; I cannot wholly die
  While thou'rt alive, and kind ;
My body might decay, but I
  Should leave my soul behind !

In addition to this turgid effusion there was a little song, afterwards set to music by "Lauriette," and sung with much success at the St. James' Hall concerts by Madame Squallini:

Love it is a tender thing,
Formed by angel's whispering;
Gently tend it ere it die,
Leaving gloom and misery.

True love cannot fettered be
By the world's hypocrisy.
Rules let silly mortals make:
Them, or else their hearts, they break.

Eyes that love and lips that kiss,
Nature's paradise is this;
When the silent music sways
New-born passion's happy days.

And the beating of their hearts,
That no prudish terror parts,
Marks the tune of Love's own song,
"Life is Love, and Love is long!"

CHAPTER XXII.

> You have not known
> The dreadful soul of woman, who one day
> Forgets the old and takes the new to heart;
> Forgets what man remembers, and therewith
> Forgets the man.
>
> D. G. Rossetti.

The shrubbery at Hollingly was celebrated. In its complicated windings it was easy to lose yourself—at least many couples said so after a prolonged absence, thus falsifying the old adage that two heads are better than one, for no person alone had ever yet been puzzled into forgetfulness of his proper road. How Alice and Windermere found themselves, the day after his coming, in a shady walk some two miles from the house, the former of them at least never knew. They had commenced their walk with a large party, but there had been much straggling and defection, and at length, as we have said, they were alone together. It was one of those afternoons which make up to us English for the disagreeables of our changeful climate. A bright blue sky, in which white fleecy clouds sailed lazily, occasionally passing before the sun and giving us a grateful respite from his beams; the shadows on the distant hills, ever changing, ever beautiful; the bark of the sheep-dog in the neighbouring fields, blending almost musically with the tinkling of the Swiss bells which the Duke insisted on putting on his cattle; and with the hum of the honey-gathering bee, a scent of many flowers on the summer air, a delicious feeling of repose all around.

It was a day, an hour, for love; but of course for love only which is legitimate. However, we grieve to say that these two young people sauntering along, but few words passing between them, *did* feel the influence of

their surroundings. Nature is too careless in these matters, and the philosophers ought to see to it.

"I will go if you wish it," he said at last, stopping short and facing her.

She said nothing, and the birds went on singing just as if there were no such things as death struggles in human hearts.

"I don't know why I came—I——"

"No! Why—why did you come?"

She spoke eagerly, but never looked up.

"I suppose it was because I couldn't stop away. Destiny is too strong sometimes."

"Destiny? Is it destiny?"

"Call it what you will," he said softly, and managing to meet her eyes for a moment. "Any name will do for—misery."

"Misery?"

"Yes. What else is all this? You make a plaything of me—fool me—drive me mad with those eyes, and then talk of propriety and duty as coldly as you would order a bonnet. I suppose women are all the same; but I did think that you——"

"You thought that I was as bad as many others whom you have—known?"

"I thought you were—what you are—an angel, or perhaps I thought nothing. I simply fell in love; and who reasons, or thinks, or argues then? Now you have had your success, and can go and laugh at me and try somebody else."

"Do you think so hardly of me?"

"Have you not played with my love?"

"I have *not!*" and the colour rose in Alice's pale cheeks as she looked up, her lips quivering with repressed feeling. "You know I have not! Do you believe one cannot feel and—and hide it?"

She put her hand on her side, and her breath came quickly, but he would not spare her a jot.

"You hide it so well that it is hard to believe in its existence. It is so easy to talk of hidden feelings, while you order me away."

"No, no!"

"You do not wish me gone, Alice? You do not know how much rests on your answer."

"Why," cried the poor girl, "why do you try me so hard?"

"Because I love you—because you love me. Can you deny it? Tell me now, here, once for all, as you shall answer for your word to heaven, that you do not love me."

There was no answer; her breath came short, and with one hand she grasped the branch of the cedar under which they stood. There was no answer, and no sound but the distant cooing of a wood-dove.

"You cannot say so!" His breath was on her cheek, his arm round her.

"God help me, I cannot," she cried, raising her tear-stained eyes to his and yielding to his embrace. And their lips met, and the birds sang on, and the sun shone, and the calm oxen cropped their evening meal and jingled their merry bells, just as if there were no such things as shame and remorse, as crime and breaking hearts, as faith and honour and purity trampled underfoot, in the world.

As she stood before her mirror that night, ere going to the drawing room, and saw her own loveliness; as she listened at dinner to the old Duke's courtly compliments, and smiled approval of Flittery's stories; more than all, when Jack took her in his arms before going to the smoking-room, and vowed his little wife was perfection, there was one person who hated and despised Alice Chillingham from the depths of her nature, and that person was Alice Chillingham herself.

CHAPTER XXIII.

So justice, while she winks at crimes,
Stumbles on innocence sometimes.
Hudibras.

THE French cynic, who sometimes took a rather narrow view of society, has written, "*On peut trouver des femmes qui n'ont jamais eu de galanterie ; mais il est rare d'en trouver qui n'en ayent jamais eu qu'une.*" It is sad to think this may be true of women in general. At any rate it was not so of Alice. Her love—now awakened in full force for the first time—was an unselfish and an abiding passion. She had given all, and it was a grief to her to think there was no farther, no greater sacrifice she could make. There was scarcely any remembrance of herself in her mind—all was his. Women who can feel like this had better never to be born; they are unfit for the businesslike and practical nineteenth century; they are anomalies, who should have existed only when Arthur rode in search of knightly adventure, with Excalibur flashing in his hand. Jack had been the first civilised young man Alice had ever seen; her youth had been strange and desolate, and his ready sympathy and frank admiration would have touched a girl even less impressible than she. Till now she had never dreamed that he was not first in her heart; only there had been a never expressed and scarcely understood feeling of disappointment with life, and with what she considered was love. It seemed so tame and humble compared with the article as described in poem and romance. Perhaps it was her fault, and could only be attributed to her coldness and earthliness. Now, suddenly, painfully, she was disabused. She knew now how swiftly the blood could course through her veins; she knew now how weak had been her wildest notion of

the sentiment which—let the cynics and utilitarians say what they please—after all does govern a good part of the world. A gambler is supposed to live in a world of his own, quite untouched by changes around him. Empires may fall, relatives may die, wives may elope, Mr. Gladstone may write pamphlets. What matter—shall it be black or red? A woman "in love" for the first time is much in this state, drunk, dreaming, bereft of feeling, of affections, impervious to all which does not touch that one subject. The "moral sense" of which we spoke before is for a time beaten entirely down, only however to arise again when the first delirium is past, and to take a cruelly effective revenge. It was impossible that Jack could fail to see the change which now came over Alice's manner to himself. But he—and he alone of all lookers-on—entirely failed to guess the cause. Of course as she grew colder and could less and less often be prevailed upon to indulge in those little marital toyings which are so annoying to lookers-on, he grew the hotter and the more anxious for such distractions. After a round of visits, in most of which they met Windermere—the shutters of North Street were taken down, and Jack, reluctantly giving up his vague plans of hunting—plans the state of his banker's book sternly forbade the execution of—determined to get through the winter as best he might by the aid of his clubs, a little harmless play, and much theatre-going. He was growing almost as moody and fitful as his wife. Do what he would, he could not put a stop to the estrangement which was growing up between them. They were drifting apart, he saw with dismay, and he was powerless to prevent it. There was nothing he could really take hold of. Alice was soft and gentle, contradicted him far less than before, smiled when he came home, smiled even when he came home very late at night—a piece of matrimonial rebellion she had used to take some umbrage at. There was no absolute thing to complain of. When he told her that she confided less in him than before, she said

the only reason was that there was nothing to confide. When he asked her if she was unhappy, she only kissed him and said "No," and then perhaps put on a false air of gaiety which hurt him almost more than her mournfulness.

Poor Jack! It was a sad experience for a young, ardent nature such as his. He had no *hardness*—not even so much as is necessary in the hard world—and he believed in good so thoroughly. Life to him was what a smiling port is to a sailor who has been long at sea. Everything was lovely; promises were kept; faith was reliable. There was no purgatory in his idea of existence—it was either heaven or hell.

And he lost much of his equanimity of temper, became decidedly "cross," and absented himself more and more from the pretty little house in North Street.

His embarrassments in the way of money were also not calculated to enhance his happiness. Creditors were rapidly losing the oily manner of the tradesman anxious to please, and assuming the obnoxious air of the dun. Jack's spasmodic efforts at economy did but little good, and indeed had the effect of rendering these folks suspicious, and neither he nor his wife had very clear ideas as to that grand principle of economic life, that there are exactly twenty shillings in a pound.

The more Jack stayed at his club the oftener during the winter did Windermere run up from Melton, where his horses had a splendidly easy time of it, and an unlooked-for opportunity of attempting the mysterious equine feat of eating their heads off; and of course the world, both at the head-quarters of hunting and in London, wagged their heads and said things of Jack which would have startled that young and innocent gentleman.

Windermere was not by nature worse than most other London men. He governed himself according to his lights, and could scarcely be blamed because he failed to see there was wrong where no one had seriously taught him to look

for it. From the moment of his going to Oxford—we will do Eton the justice to say there are no toadies among the boys and few among the masters—he had been put upon a pedestal above other men, and invited to be selfish, and to permit lesser mortals to flatter, and fetch and carry for him.

Once launched into London society, he was at once the target for all the bright eyes around him. With good looks, good temper, average abilities, an old title, boundless wealth, who was so regardless of worldly advantage as to say him nay? And as he tossed his coroneted handkerchief about, surely he would have been of extraordinary virtue to remember that what was genial fun to him was grief and ruin perhaps to many others. Society shouted in his ear continually one refrain, "Amuse yourself! put your foot on my neck! trample me well down! I like it from your lordship!" and sang of him in the words of Herrick:

> May his pretty Dukeship grow
> Like to a rose of Jericho!
> * * * *
> May the Grace and the Hours,
> Strew his hopes and him with flowers,
> And so dress him up with Love
> As to be the Chick of Jove!

Could it be expected that he would think of any other person than himself, when all conspired to point out that he owed no duty but to that person?

His manner with women was almost perfect, and stood in marked contrast to the awkward *insouciance* now affected by our golden youth. He had found that, although it was no doubt less trouble to lounge and yawn, and put your feet up, yet courtesy was amply repaid by increased success; and he knew well that a pleasant smile is very little trouble, and carries with it its own reward.

To men—except those of his own set—he was reticent and somewhat haughty. But he was too rich to be un-

popular, and the people he snubbed rather respected him for doing so.

Careful enough in small things, never spending half-a-crown when a florin would do as well, he knew when to be generous, even lavish, with proper effect; and he would sometimes fool away money on race-courses, or over cards, with apparent recklessness, while in reality knowing exactly how much it would be convenient for him to lose, and being quite ready to stop when the limit was reached.

Alice Chillingham was only one in a long line of victims; perhaps one of the most difficult, and therefore the most valued, but not standing out from the crowd with any especial prominence. She cast down her pearls, and the pig who picked them up did so as a favour, but was enough of an educated pig to prefer them to acorns.

The *liaison* was a great boon to those who remained in town for the winter, when so few people run away with each other, and when, as the Frenchman said, we all commit suicide in the Thames.

The utter ignorance of Jack, or his criminal pretence of ignorance; the beauty, the freshness, the *Americanness* of Alice; the wealth and previous performances of Windermere, all combined to make it one of those choice pieces of scandal which to quote—or rather to misquote—Gray, did

Wake to ecstasy the living liar.

The Rev. Theophilus Garter, who had by this time united himself to Emily, heard of it, and lifted his white hands in pious horror. Emily consigned her brother and his wife to the lowest pit of that place which amiable philanthropists so pleasantly declare is to be the ulterior destiny of most of us, and admired her husband. She always admired her husband; and as he liked being admired, they lived very happily.

As vanity is the ruling passion and the most lasting, so it follows that true happiness between two people tied

to each other for life, can only exist when one is mean enough to flatter, and the other is stupid enough to like being flattered.

A fool and a hypocrite run capitally in double harness.

Emily was one of those women who begin with a certain quantity of faith, evenly spread over religion, fashion, love and all the other objects of nineteenth-century estimation, but who, from some inward cause—such as ugliness, shyness, or want of surface geniality—gradually lose all their beliefs save one: the one which combines in the highest degree hysterical sentiment and comfortableness, and which is accessible to the ugliest and the most shy—emotional religion. All the enthusiasm that had carried her through night after night of painful *wall-flowering* balls; that had enabled her to ride over a fence (with a feeling akin to that of Curtius as he dashed to his doom, in her heart), because Lord Eskdale was out hunting, and had avowed himself fond of ladies who can ride; and had buoyed her up as she studied and tried to commit to memory for sentimental quotation poetry the meaning of which she failed to grasp, and of the music of which she recked nothing: driven out of one fortress after another. had at last fixed itself firmly in the mighty stronghold of the Church. What she worshipped was the outward and visible sign rather than that which it symbolized, the servant-priest rather than the Master that he served, the granite-built church she repaired rather than the unknown region she tried to think she would like to repair to; but her faith in its narrow groove, was not particularly harmful to herself or to those around her; and if she complacently regarded the imminent destruction in a painful and never-ending agony of most of those with whom she daily shook hands and exchanged compliments, after all she gave charming tea and beautifully cut bread-and-butter in the pretty house hard by St. Banbury's Church, and spoke of sinners in high places with a tear-

ful charity which seemed to combine justice and mercy in a manner befitting a Christian in Belgravia.

The Reverend Theophilus, inspired one afternoon by many muffins and several cups of tea—greasy, glowing, and good-looking—had ventured to attempt to snatch this brand, their near relative—and a fierce light beats upon the pulpit of a popular preacher—from the burning; but the reception he received in North Street was too much even for his persistence.

Alice surpassed herself in her indignation—the sense of fury which arises from a knowledge of the justice of the accusation—and, her temper having been a little ruffled that week by some performances of Jack's, spoke up and flashed her great eyes in a manner which caused the sainted Mentor to wish himself away.

Alice thought he was a hypocrite; she looked at his patent leather boots, his lavender gloves, his brushed-up hair, his general aspect of pomatum, and could not believe in his sincerity; but she was to a certain extent wrong—next to himself, the man certainly believed in his Creator.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Vetabo qui Cereris sacrum
Vulgarit arcanæ sub iisdem
Sit trabibus, vel fragilemque mecum
Solvat phaselum.

HORACE.

THE behaviour of Jack's, which we mentioned in the last chapter as having ruffled his wife's temper, was in this wise. We will not insult our readers' intelligence by telling them that, although she was in love with another man, she was ready to resent and to grieve over any diminution of Jack's regard for herself. That goes without saying. And she believed that such a diminution was taking place. He made no secret of his acquaintance with and admiration of Violet Vandeleur, the actress; indeed, out of *pique*, he was rather inclined to exaggerate his liking for her. As often as possible he took Alice to the theatre where she displayed her well-shaped legs; and Alice frequently detected, or thought that she detected, glances of intelligence passing across the footlights. That she had no right, situated as she was, to resent this did not make it any more bearable; and womanlike, she tried to make havoc of the data in her domestic history, and to prove to herself that her own conduct was palliated by circumstances which followed it. It was of no use, however. Had Jack been a very Lord Rochester she could not have done other than despise herself. And Jack was no Lord Rochester. He was not even libertine enough to be popular in this naughty day. Alice would have been astonished had she known that his visits to Violet were almost exclusively taken up by the discussion of herself. Thirsting for sympathy, and finding his wife daily less sympathetic, Jack had opened his heart to the

frank little actress, who had taken a real liking for him, and was grateful for his confidence and friendship as she had never been for the vows and diamonds of her many adorers. As she truly said, she had never been treated as a woman, much less as a friend, by any man since she left the old farm-house; and it was intensely pleasant to her to sit, in her pretty little drawing-room in Brompton, and give Jack good advice and sympathy, and feel for the moment—until Sir John came in with his false teeth and falser laugh—that she was of a higher use in the world than to dance a *cancan*.

She had a soft voice, and could throw a world of tender interest into her eyes. Besides, she was warm-hearted, and grieved to see this promising *ménage* so soon broken up. Alice she had seen from afar off, and Jack delighted in the honest admiration she evinced for that lady.

"She *is* pretty, isn't she?" he would say.

"Pretty! she's a regular stunner—I mean a beauty! I shall never cure myself of slang, Jack, so it's no use your looking glum. Fancy your not being happy with her! And you are so fond of each other, too!"

"I don't know about that. Look here, Violet, I'd give all I had in the world—not much, certainly," said poor Jack, mentally appraising his effects—"to get her to look at me once again as she used. I don't believe she knows what's happening; I believe she can't help it; but she doesn't care for me any more—that's the long and short of it." And he commenced to pace up and down the little room, the countless little tables covered with china monstrosities having many narrow escapes as he brushed by.

"Do you think there's anyone else?" asked Violet, watching him gravely.

He stopped short.

"Anyone else? I don't quite understand."

"I mean do you think she likes anyone else? They say women, even great ladies, sometimes do it."

Violet could not restrain a little sneer.

He burst out, "I've a devilish good mind never to come here again. Anyone else? Violet, must you think everyone as—like yourself?"

"No, no, Jack," she said humbly. "Of course I didn't mean it. You see I can only judge from my fellows, and know nothing of the swells. This Lord Windermere you talk about so often—he's *your* friend, isn't he?"

"Yes," said Jack, mollified, but still frowning. "He's my friend and hers too. He saved her life, you know—or at least did a plucky thing which many fellows wouldn't have done; and—and, besides, he has been very good-natured to me." He was thinking of several hundreds which Windermere had lent him to settle a whist account, and which stood somewhat between him and his rest at present.

"I never heard of Lord Windermere's being good-natured before," said Violet, looking up quickly.

"Didn't you? Oh, I daresay you haven't heard much about him. He's the best-natured fellow going—the most generous in fact." Jack thought this at least was due to the man who had saved him from what he believed would have been disgrace; he was so very ignorant of "the way we live now."

"Jack," said Violet, suddenly, touching his arm to bring him to an anchor, "you haven't borrowed money from him?"

"Well—well—yes. How did you guess? Why do you ask? One can always borrow from a pal, I suppose?" And Jack looked huffily surprised.

"He's no pal of yours."

"No pal of mine! Oh yes he is. Quite enough to——"

"To borrow money from. Jack, I'm sorry you have done this."

"My dear girl, of course I am too; I'm sorry I wanted the money, and I'm sorry I haven't paid it back. But I hate talking on unpleasant subjects. Windy's as rich as a Jew, and isn't in any hurry to get it back. Besides, my

turn of luck must come soon; I don't believe any man ever held such cards as I have for the last month."

"Does Mrs. Chillingham know you play?" asked Violet.

"You're in a very inquisitive mood this morning, Vi. No, I don't suppose she thinks I put on quite so much as I do." And then he went into a rhapsody over her wonderful cleverness as the manager of a household, again dwelt on her beauty, and finally got back to his misery at her coldness, and his determination to bring matters to their old footing; while the actress sat quietly by, knowing the whole miserable story as well as if it had been enacted before her, and trembling to think of the day when this eager, loving, credulous boy should come to be aware of his dishonour.

That time was not far off. A few days after the conversation we have recorded, Sir John Glorme met Jack as he came out of the Brompton villa.

Sir John was not in a good temper. He was fully assured that this good-looking youngster was poaching on his preserves, and he had been for some time trying to make up his mind whether he would cast Violet off and fly to a fresh conquest, or whether he could, without in any way compromising his dignity and his character for success, warn the impudent trespasser off.

As luck would have it, on this especial afternoon he had received bad news from his trainer, added to which was the fact that a chase he had engaged in just before had ended in the triumph and escape of the prey.

"Ah, Chillingham! Here again, eh? Do you suppose I pay for all this"—and he waved his arm so as to take in the garden, villa, pretty stables, and Violet herself—"for your benefit? Of course I'm delighted to see you *when* I ask you—*when* I ask you."

Jack was too preoccupied to care for the Baronet's anger, and was about to pass by with a careless nod, when the other interposed.

"Did you hear me? Because you can't stay at home, I don't want you to live here. I pay just as much for Violet as Windermere does for your wife, and you have no more right here than you have there."

He tried to laugh, but an awkward sensation that he had said too much oppressed him. Young men are sometimes so hasty—and so strong! He was somewhat comforted, however, by seeing a stalwart policeman busily engaged in eating an orange on the other side of the street.

Jack stared him in the face as if he had heard nothing for a moment, and then, in a low, hoarse voice, said:

"Say that again—all of it!"

Sir John was not at his ease. There is time for much that is disagreeable before even the fleetest policeman can cross a road.

"I only—only hinted you should not call here while I am out."

"But you said something else."

Jack's tone was low, and his words seemed to come through his closed teeth; but he didn't look at the Baronet, and that worthy began to feel more at ease.

"I only mentioned what all the world knows—that Windermere calls very often on your wife."

"But you said—about paying——"

"Do you mean to pretend you know nothing of it?" asked Sir John with a sneer.

He was reassured by Jack's calmness. The latter looked him straight in the eyes now.

"Sir John Glorme, you dared just now to say that Windermere paid for—my wife. It's a d——d lie. He lent *me* some money the other day—that's the mistake. But look here——" Jack made a step towards him, and Sir John glancing over his shoulder, saw with dismay that the policeman had moved away—"If I ever hear of your whispering such foul lies again—and if such tales get about, I shall know who spread them—I'll kill you like a rat!"

Jack looked rather fine as he towered over the shaking form of the disconcerted Baronet, who, however, managed to reply with some semblance of dignity:

"I am sorry a momentary feeling of anger made me say what I did. I only repeated what is in everyone's mouth. I am glad to hear it is not true. I advise you to have it contradicted." And he passed unmolested through the garden gate, and disappeared into the villa, where he speedily steadied his disordered nerves with a strong draught prepared by the fair hands of Miss Violet.

Jack stood still in the road while you might have counted a hundred. A veil had suddenly dropped from his eyes. Trusting as he had been before, in exactly the same proportion was he now hopeless. It scarcely occurred to him to question the truth of what Sir John had hinted.

> Trifles, light as air,
> Are, to the jealous, confirmation strong
> As proofs of holy writ.

And it must be admitted that Windermere's constant visits to North Street, the extraordinary fact of milliners' bills being no longer a constant torment to the establishment, and Alice's changed manner, were scarcely trifles to one with his eyes newly opened.

The wish may often be the "father to the thought," but on many occasions we seem eager to convince ourselves of what we dread to know. A jealous man, constantly seeking what he would not find, is only one amid innumerable instances.

A passing hansom caused him to look up—for in our direst woe we are unwilling to be run over; it was empty, and in another moment he was whirling away to meet his fate, which on this occasion was represented by Messrs. Collinson and Hoade, the well-known bankers, with whom he had an appointment, which the cabman's question of "Where to, sir?" recalled to his memory.

CHAPTER XXV.

Venus in vain the wedded pair would crown
If angry Fortune on their union frown.

LORD LYTTLETON.

When I was at home I was in a better place; but travellers must be content.

As You Like It.

THERE was some excitement at Sinnington, Lord Brocklesby's place in Snarlshire, where the family were passing the winter, for the Duke of Cheshire had suddenly proposed himself as a visitor. His grace was not much given to going to other men's houses; for, as he said, if he changed his habits, he was a nuisance to himself; and if he adhered to them, he was a nuisance to his host; and least of all did he go to the Brocklesbys', whom he detested. Once a year, in the summer, he was induced to eat his dinner in Eaton Square, but several times of late he had shown symptoms of rebellion against this very moderate piece of family duty. So his note asking to be allowed to come to Sinnington, if they could find room for him, created some stir. The notion of the possibility of *not* finding room for the head of her ladyship's family was very funny; for as Spencer observed, fixing his glass with a fiercer twist of his eyebrows than usual, there was scarcely any menial office which they would not have undertaken for him with grateful pride.

Shy and reserved, except in the company of pretty women who could talk, with a smattering of a good many things, and showing on the surface a sort of easy-going satirical power which was rather alarming in a duke, even the boldest social iconoclast was somewhat afraid of him; and there was an air of mystery about the doings in the

big villa of Maida Vale and in the pretty hotel in Paris, which had a prodigious effect on those unfortunate ones whose wickednesses were known and could not, therefore, be deemed more heinous than they were. He took a sort of mild interest in Lord Brocklesby, which had commenced when he heard of that nobleman having proposed to his half sister.

"Either he is mad," said the Duke, "or he is the pluckiest individual in Europe;" and even yet he had not quite made up his mind which he was.

The strongest feeling the Duke probably had of a positive kind was a dislike to the clergy, and had he known that among the guests of Sinnington were the Rev. Theophilus Garter and his bride, even the business he had in hand would scarcely have been powerful enough to take him there.

This business was no less than to expostulate with the Brocklesbys on the little trouble they seemed to take to keep Alice and Jack out of danger. The Duke had—later than others, for he discouraged gossip—heard of what was said about Alice and Windermere, and had smiled sadly, but more or less indifferently, until the money part of the story was told him. He was fond of Jack—in his careless, selfish way—and admired Alice excessively. When he had the gout at Hollingly she was the only person he could bear near him; and somehow the little mock flirtation which, according to his usual habit, he had instituted with her, did not seem *so* mock, did not remind him of his age so much as most of such affairs. Like many elderly men who have sneered at women all their lives, he was quite ready now to fall at the feet of any who would only "make believe a great deal" that he was some twenty years younger than the Peerage would have it; and young ladies who blushed when he spoke to them, and trembled in expectation of a caustic *mot*, little knew how easily they might have gained a ducal coronet. If the Duke had been a country

squire he would have married his cook; as it was, the responsibilities of his position, and a sense of refinement which he at once cherished and despised, alone kept him from some nearly equal folly. We say "folly" from habit, but after all the cook generally makes the squire uncommonly happy.

"That's a nice boy of yours, Brocklesby," he began, as he strolled back from the farm with his host, his brain bewildered by all the ingenious theories connected with agriculture to which he had listened.

"He is," said his lordship, emphatically, stopping short, and confronting him. "He is that, entirely owing to the way I trained him. My theory is—or was; I've invented a still better plan now—that, as surprise is the essence of wit, so it is the element which we should oftenest call up in teaching. Let a child know nothing until, say, ten or twelve years old, and then suddenly tell him that C A T spells cat. He never forgets it; it so surprises him."

"Did you teach Jack in this way?" asked the Duke, half weary, half amused.

"Yes—— No, by-the-bye, I only thought of it after he had gone to Eton, or I should have. No. I had intended to try it at the village school, but her ladyship—who, clever woman as she is, is rather slow at grasping new ideas—joined with the dolt of a schoolmaster in objecting, and——"

"Why don't you ask Jack and his wife here?" asked the other, abruptly.

Lord Brocklesby never objected to being interrupted. A subject was to him as a stick to a dog when he has fetched it out of the water. He worries it, and tears it, and clings to it, but is quite ready to drop it if another be thrown in for him.

"God bless my soul! Why, we *do*. At least, we have. They've been here this winter."

"I think it would be well to get them away from town now. Of course, Brocklesby, it would be affectation in us

to pretend we haven't heard any of the ill-natured stories which are being spread about them ; and their being here would do much to stop those stories."

"To tell the truth," said Lord Brocklesby, looking rather perplexed, " I did mention the subject to her ladyship the other day——"

" And she didn't like it ? "

" Well, you see, with all her faults she is very sound on one point. No one can ever say she tolerates the fastness which is all the fashion now, and——"

" You mean she thinks Alice too fast to associate with your daughter ? " asked the Duke, his lip curling.

" I'm sure, my dear Cheshire," said his lordship, nervously flicking at the laurel leaves with his stick, " I'm sure *I* have no vulgar prejudices, but after having tried both, I have to come to the conclusion that a quiet life is preferable to a stormy one ; and her ladyship requires a *very* light hand. Besides, I've a theory that——"

" Don't you see," interrupted the Duke, impatiently, " that these foolish children are simply going to perdition left to themselves ? They neither of them know anything of the world, and they've got into such trouble that only a miracle can save them. Why, do you know what they say of your son ? "

" Yes, yes ; and of course it's not true. No Chillingham would allow anyone to pay for him. Very few Chillinghams got the chance. We were always an unlucky family——"

" Why, do you mean to say——" began the other; but his lordship went placidly on :

" I remember a fellow—you probably knew him—Jack Mendlip—oh, no, that was the elder brother ; this was Tommy Mendlip, with a cock eye, you know. There were stories about old Middlesex paying for him ; and Mrs. Tommy was lovely—octoroon blood or something, met her in America or Africa—but of course they were all lies. She ran away with someone soon after, though ;

yes, with Middlesex himself. And then Tommy went through the Bankruptcy Court, and was made governor of some place or other, and drank himself to death in six months. Ah," and he sighed sentimentally, "those were jolly days, weren't they, Cheshire?"

The Duke saw that nothing was to be done in this quarter, and his next attack was made on Spencer, who had come home armed with piles of blue-books to prepare a Bill it was his intention to bring forward the next session, having for its object the prohibition of the accumulation of wealth either by nations or individuals, which he ingeniously proved was the initial cause of all evil. As he said, it was a large subject, and it was not to be wondered at that he was rather inaccessible during its contemplation. As a matter of principle he disliked dukes; but this one with his good-natured smile and total indifference to his (Spencer's) most startling assertions, rather awed him.

"Really, I never trouble myself with these matters," he said, laying down his Adam Smith with a sigh. "They seem very unimportant; and, as a matter of fact, their occurring to one's relations does not alter their importance. As a practical, impartial man, I ought not to mind reading in the paper, 'Brown *v.* Brown and Jones, less than Chillingham *v.* Chillingham and——' anyone else."

"Carry that principle out, and it ought not to matter whether you or Brown is kicked."

"Ah, philosophy is not perfected yet. I do believe it would be possible for a man sufficiently to conquer matter by mind to be able to look upon actual bodily pain in himself as calmly as if it were in someone else. But to return to the subject on which you spoke. If what people are saying is true, what can you or anyone do? If it is untrue, what need to interfere?"

"The simple fact is, my dear Spencer," said the Duke with difficulty controlling his impatience, "that there is a clear duty before your parents——"

"It can't be so very clear, or they would see it," said Spencer, adjusting his glass.

"Well, I shall speak to your mother," and the Duke turned away, muttering a word which sounded very like "idiot."

His interview with his half-sister was not more successful than the others. She was ready to do anything he liked, to take his advice in any case, except this. On this point he really must allow her to take her own line. Women understood more of these things than men, and she had a distinct duty to perform to her daughter. One could not be too particular nowadays, and—well, the fact was that Alice did not come of the same class as themselves. Although the Duke and others had been so kind about it, of course the marriage had been a terrible thing for Jack; and what had happened was only natural. Indeed, she herself had predicted it. Her dear brother must not be offended; it was so good of him to come down to Sinnington and have a few quiet days with them; he really *must* not be offended, but Alice could not be asked there. Jack, of course, would come when he liked."

"And Windermere too?" asked the Duke, with something like an oath.

"Lord Windermere can go anywhere. I don't mean to defend him in this instance, but men in his position are often more sinned against than sinning. And Alice——"

"Good God, Theodora! do you mean to hint that that pretty innocent little thing——"

Lady Brocklesby coloured through her rouge.

"I mean to say that from the very first she was a flirt, and that from the very first she had determined to make up to Lord Windermere! Before she came into the family he was most particular in his attentions to Jane—lunched in Eaton Square continually."

"That *must* have meant something," put in his grace, with a horrible recollection of one hot meal he had accidentally been caught for.

"In short, I have reason to know that he liked her excessively."

And remembering her wrongs at the hands of her son and daughter-in-law, Lady Brocklesby's lips *thinned* till you could scarcely see where her mouth was.

"Well, I shall ask them to Hollingly at once."

Afraid of her brother as she was, she could not resist the sneer—

"Do you think *that* will restore her character?"

The Duke was shocked to think that a relation of his could look so ill-tempered, but took no notice of this remark. He at once recognised the truth which was in it. One of the disadvantages of his bachelor position this certainly was. Nevertheless a vague idea entered his head that by doing violence to his tenderest feelings and filling his house with bishops and curates, he might make the company so excessively respectable as to send Alice from it with the world's absolution upon her.

"Important business" soon made his return to London necessary; and he entered the Maida Vale mansion, feeling intensely the extreme wisdom of those Eastern potentates who, on ascending their thrones, kill off, for prudential reasons, every relative they possess.

CHAPTER XXVI.

My prime of youth is but a frost of cares,
My feast of joy is but a dish of pain,
My crop of corn is but vain hope of gain.
The day is fled, and yet I saw no sun.
And now I live, and now my life is done.

Chidiock Titchbourne.

"SING to me," said Alice, shivering; "I feel low to-day; low and frightened at nothing. Sing to me."

Windermere was not a brilliant performer, but in a room his voice was quite loud enough, and he knew how to throw more expression into it than many greater singers can do.

"Bright eyes! bright eyes! your guilt is clear,
A wicked theft you've done!
A man and a heart did enter here,
And the man went out alone.

"Bright eyes! bright eyes! the heart you hold—
Encaged, no more to rove—
Is starving, shivering in the cold,
For hearts subsist on love.

"Bright eyes! bright eyes! you have so much
That it could live upon;
A heaven is in your finger touch,
And in your smile a sun.

"Bright eyes! bright eyes! you should not prove
So cruel in your play,
Or let it feed its fill on love,
Or let it die to-day."

Alice sighed. She had not listened to the commonplace words of the song, but the simple melody had been an accompaniment to her thoughts—thoughts which, had he guessed them, would have astonished the good-looking

youth beside her. She was leaning on the piano, both the little hands supporting her chin, her eyes looking dreamily at nothing.

> 'Tis expectation makes a blessing dear ;
> Heaven were not heaven if we knew what it were.

What was this cold feeling of disappointment at her heart but the disappearance of the glamour with which she had surrounded her first love, the awakening from the dream which she thought, in her insensate folly, would last for ever ?

Was it for this she had lost her own respect ?—was it for this she had been so false, so cruel, so contemptible ? And yet she loved him with all her heart still. She met his inquiring gaze.

"I am unhappy, Clare—wretched ! Do you think wickedness always makes one so ? They used to say," she went on, with a miserable attempt at a smile, "that everything wrong is pleasant. I'm sure it ought to be, considering what one gives up for it."

"Gives up, Alice ? I don't quite understand ;" and he twirled his moustache rather angrily.

"Well," cried she, "is it nothing to give up one's peace of mind, one's self-respect ?—to be daily, hourly lying to and deceiving one who is so true, so generous ? Oh, Clare, I wish I was dead— I wish I was dead !"

Heedless of grammar she bent her head upon the piano and sobbed.

Windermere, like most men, hated scenes ; like a spoilt man, he never endured them.

"This is nonsense," he said, rising, and taking up his hat and onyx-topped cane. "You're overstrung and nervous, and——"

"Oh, what have I done ! what have I done !" she wailed, and he fairly ran away, observing as he opened the door, "You ought to be more sensible, dear. This is absurd. Everybody does it ;" and with this he went downstairs

and was soon in the afternoon express on his way to Melton; wondering, as he meditatively puffed his cigar, why women were so foolish, and could never make themselves agreeable for more than a fortnight.

"She takes things too seriously, that little woman," he said next day to Charlie Holster, when enjoying with that hard-riding young gentleman those sweet smoking-room confidences which follow a good day's sport and a dinner worthy of it. "She'll frighten me away before long, and only have herself to thank for it."

"Ah," said Charlie, wagging his head with all the sagacity bred of two bottles of champagne and unlimited glasses of fizzing drink afterwards; "women are all very well in summer. They ought to follow the example of the swallows, and go away somewhere before the hunting season begins. You've lost some of our best things this year, Windy, with all that philandering up in town. What do you ride to-morrow?"

"Gad, I don't know. Whatever the great Mr. Jones pleases, I suppose."

"You let that fellow have his own way far too much," said Captain Holster; and, leaving the subject of womankind, the conversation turned to that of the more useful animal—in winter—the stud-groom.

* * * * *

On his way to the banker's, with whom he had an important appointment to discuss ways and means, Jack tried his best to collect his thoughts. He was utterly stunned by the blow he had received. Alice—his Alice—false? It could not be! And yet—— He wondered vaguely what made the people he met stare so curiously at him, not knowing that his eyes were the eyes of a madman, and his expression almost that of a murderer.

Mr. Hoade's explanations and expostulations in the bank-parlour he scarcely heard or heeded, and that worthy

junior partner concluded that he had imbibed too much sherry. As he rose to depart, however, Mr. Hoade let fall some words which fully aroused him from his trance.

"If you could only keep your account with the same regularity as Mrs. Chillingham, it would be so far better. I don't think she has ever been overdrawn."

Alice had, when they first set up house, petitioned, as a great joke, to have a separate account; so that, as she then said, laughing, her economies in dress might be kept quite distinct from Jack's extravagances in other domestic arrangements.

"Ah! hasn't she? But it would be difficult to confuse so small an account."

"I think of the two it is rather the larger. I must wish you good afternoon now, Mr. Chillingham," and he turned away with a bow.

"Rather larger!" cried Jack. "Might I——I suppose there would be no objection to my looking at Mrs. Chillingham's account?"

"None in the least," said Mr. Hoade. "I will send a clerk to you with it."

There it was, seeming to stand out from the rest of the page, transferring itself as it were from the paper to Jack's brain, the entry:

June ——, 18——.

Per Lord Windermere, £1,000.

The clerk, who was a clerk of some position, and had studied human nature as it is to be found in Camberwell and in the novels of the day, read the romance in real life before him at a glance, and his scorn of the stupidity shown by Lord Windermere in supplying proof against himself in the shape of this cheque was extreme. Indeed, the transaction was scarcely worthy of his lordship's skill and wariness, though, as he afterwards observed to Mr. Flittery, "You see, I had my cheque-book in my

pocket, and a chance of creating a secret between her and me which might never have occurred again. If I'd sent notes even an hour afterwards she'd have refused them. The thing was to let her see, while she was bothered about the dressmaker's bill, the money to pay it by its side. All the same, I grant you it was a false move."

"Per Lord Windermere, £1000." Jack stood looking at the entry till the pitying clerk was fain to recall him to a sense that time is money.

"Have you done with the account?" he asked.

Jack stared at him, put on his hat, left his gloves and stick lying on the table, and walked out, pursued by his hansom, which he had forgotten to pay.

He got in, his property was brought to him by the messenger, and the cabman said:

"Where to, sir?"

"Where to!" It sounded like cruel mockery. He had no home now. The people walking along the street seemed to know of his shame; the cabman surely was sneering at him. Where could he hide himself? But even with a broken heart you cannot sit in a stationary hansom long. Fate, the great policeman, sternly orders us to move on, whether we know where to go to or not.

There are times of such great misery that to act seems impossible, when the heart is so crushed out of a man that he can only grovel in the mud.

"Go to No. —, North Street," he said.

Arrived at his own house, he paid the cabman, and drew out his latch-key, but dared not enter.

Badsworth's chambers were in Jermyn Street, and he bent his steps that way.

Badsworth was at home, for it was dressing-time, and delighted to see him.

"You never look up nowadays, old fellow," he said. "But, hollo! What's the matter? You look as if you'd seen a ghost!"

"Nothing—only I don't feel quite the thing. Perhaps

I'd better go home;" and he rose and moved wearily towards the door.

"Sit down!" cried Badsworth, seizing his arm. "You look as if you were going to faint. There, drink up that stuff; it's old brandy. That's right. Why, Jack, I thought you were as strong as a horse."

"Frank," said Jack, not taking his eyes off the ground, "did you know it?"

"Know what?" asked the other, the truth flashing across him.

"About them—him and her?"

"I—well, the fact is——"

"You did know! Why didn't you tell me?"

"I know nothing certain. Jack, old chap"—and he put his hand on his friend's shoulder—"you mustn't be too quick to believe——"

Jack roes impatiently.

"I believe the worst."

"Oh no; trust me that——"

"I will trust no one—no one ever again. She tricked me—fooled me; but I'll kill him! By God, I'll kill him! And you knew it all, and stood by, and call yourself my friend! *What* did you know?" he asked turning fiercely on Badsworth.

"I knew"—Badsworth spoke slowly, and in a low voice—"I knew that he came very often—too often—to your house. I knew that people said——"

"Well?"

"They said that you couldn't afford to pay for her gowns, and——"

"Go on."

"Surely you can guess what they said. It was not true, Jack, though."

"True! Yes, I suppose it was true. I haven't found out whether he paid all her bills yet. I only know she told me she owed nothing the other day."

"Is it not possible that this was all—that what you

think is without foundation ?" asked Badsworth, lamely.

" Do men—is Windermere likely to pay away money for nothing ?"

Badsworth was silent.

" What do you mean to do ?" he asked, after a pause.

There was no answer.

" You ought to ask her for an explanation, at any rate."

" An explanation !" Jack laughed bitterly. " Women can always explain things. No. *He* shall give me one though, when I've paid him. I owe him money myself, too, Frank."

" Look upon my purse as yours, old chap. He ought to be paid at once."

" No, I won't borrow from *friends* again. Who knows that you may not be as false as he ?"

Badsworth drew back the hand he had extended to press Jack's—the nearest approach to a caress between Englishmen.

" Forgive me, old fellow, forgive me. I didn't mean it. I would take your money, if I would take anyone's. I must go now."

"Where?" said Badsworth, placing himself between his friend and the door.

" I don't know. I must be alone somewhere and think, or I shall go mad. Do you believe in a broken heart, Frank ? I wonder if it's only in novels such things happen ?" and with a ghastly smile he pushed by to the door, and walked hurriedly down the street.

Alice waited dinner that night till nine o'clock, and went to bed eventually after a solitary meal, somewhat alarmed at the unusual absence of her husband.

CHAPTER XXVII.

NORTH.—You are a gentleman, and a gamester, sir?
ARMADO.—I confess both: they are both the varnish of a complete man.

Love's Labour Lost.

JACK walked away from Badsworth's chambers with no thought where he was going, and wandered aimlessly on, much to the inconvenience of the other pedestrians, who would probably have affirmed, had they been given the opportunity, that no crisis in a man's life excuses him for running up against his fellow-creatures.

Some irony of fate seemed to force him to think of his wife as she had been—it seemed so long ago—when he trusted her implicitly; and not as she was now, deceiving, outraging him, making him an unconscious party to what appeared to him the most heinous imaginable offence.

His previous blindness was now made up for by an almost preternatural astuteness. A thousand little circumstances, which had in reality no bearing on the matter, ranged themselves in his mind on the side of the prosecution.

Everything Alice had done or omitted to do for the past three months spoke, he thought, volumes for her love of Windermere. It is to be observed that Jack never looked upon this business as anything but serious. He could not believe in his darling doing this thing—treating him, who loved her, so cruelly—except for one all-powerful reason: that she loved this man.

Jack sighed as he thought of his own inferiority in looks, in position, in wealth, in intellect, in address, in everything. What wonder he was not able to keep her for himself! And yet he would have been so loyal, so true, if she could only have tried a little harder to like

him best! No doubt they had had petty differences; perhaps he had been harsh sometimes; but surely she had known all the time how utterly he loved her.

He *had* stayed late at his club; but if she had really disliked it, did she not know that he would have vowed never to enter a club again? It certainly seemed hard upon him. He was young, and might have a long life before him; and he shuddered, much to the astonishment of a passer-by, as he thought of a long life without her. He was one of those men, rare now either in life or fiction, whose fondness for a woman has something higher and stronger in it than his fondness for horses, pictures, or a good dinner. Not romance reading, but the natural romance inherent in a fresh young heart, made him think of love much as the poets talk or sing of it. Religion he believed in, and would gladly, no doubt, have given his blood for it had he lived in the olden time. In these days the belief is tempered by the distance from week-day life at which it is now kept. The spare zeal that was in him had gone all to his love, and his worship of the little woman he had made his own was, to a certain extent, removed from all the grossness which we are accustomed to associate with that inclination of one human being for another, which itself provides us so greatly with amusement and scandal.

That Alice could have sinned for any other reason than passion in its purest form he never for one moment thought; that she had not sinned, considering the circumstances which he knew, he did not believe, for he possessed no power of casuistry which draws a broad *society* line between the will and the deed. Had Alice told him that she drew Windermere on and extracted gold from him by pretended affection, Jack would have been more mortified than he was now. That she could be false through love was no doubt horrible; that she could be false through falseness would have been far more so.

Forgive her! What! was *he* to forgive one so immea-

surably superior to him? He had never felt his insignificance till now, and now he valued himself much in the manner a dealer does a horse he means to buy. But he hardly knew how to manage such forgiveness. For her happiness—he said this to himself a thousand times—he was ready to give up any chance of his own. For her happiness he would give up even the semblance of honour, and he would almost give up honour's self. But this man: was he worthy of so great a prize? Jack remembered the many equivocal stories he had heard about him; remembered many cynical remarks about women spoken at clubs and in smoking-rooms in the small hours. No—he would not give her up to him. Although she did not think so, he, Jack, was more worthy of her love than Windermere. And could he not perhaps gain it back? Might this not be a temporary hallucination? Of course, as a great part of the world has it, a husband should not forgive in such cases; but what right had he to decide on her future, which any action of the kind he had half an hour ago contemplated would be? Could he, who loved her, be the one to ruin her—to make the tongues of men and women cry derisively at her shame. And how, oh how, could he live and know her to be away from him and cast out? It is to be observed that Jack had not that strict code of morals with regard to the found-out ones which distinguishes society. He was only a young husband suffering the very commonplace agony of discovering that he was but a husband and nothing more.

It was late before he awakened from his trance of perplexity and sorrow sufficiently to descend to the mundane action of looking at his watch; too late to think of dinner, had he indeed been able to eat. Grief is, however, a thirsty thing; and, when he had retraced his steps and found himself not a hundred yards from the green-baize doors of The Buccaneer Club, he turned in to partake of one of those champagne cocktails for which the place is celebrated.

As he moodily drank it in the front room, the muffled sounds—such as "Baccarat!" "Nine!" "That's another hundred!" "Now, then, make your game!"—that came through the folding-doors leading into the play-room, suggested to him a possible escape from the unbearable position of being in debt to Windermere.

He rapidly calculated his resources. There was his fortune. Not much when translated into a yearly income, certainly; but not a bad sum with which to tackle fortune for a night, even in so high-playing a club as The Buccaneer. Then of his commission-money there was a little left, and he had a few pounds at his banker's. True, if he lost all this he was a ruined man; but, ruined already as he was in every other way, what did such trifles as £. s. d. matter? Of course the tradesmen would suffer. That was sad, no doubt. But debts of honour must be paid first, and, after all, young gentlemen like Jack Chillingham cannot be made to sympathise greatly with shopkeepers. That it is so is wrong; but it is so, and will be as long as there are carelessness and sharp practice in the world.

Jack opened the folding-doors and entered the next room. No one looked up at his entrance; all were too much engaged in waiting for the dealer to announce his cards. "Nine," said he, dealing himself an opportune six on to the king and three; and the faces all round the long table, excepting that of the dealer, fell considerably. Englishmen, save when under foreign eyes, do not gamble as well as foreigners.

Among themselves, expressions of anger and disappointment are given vent to, and do not add to the pleasantness of the spectacle. Jack sat down after purchasing a sufficient number of counters with a cheque, the amount of which rather astonished the steward, whose duty it was to sell those dangerous pieces of ivory. At first his play was cautious. He staked a £5 counter every time, and won. Then he began to double the stake, and still

won. At last he thought he was justified in putting on two £100 counters, and they were swept away.

We will not weary the reader by recounting how Fortune played with him, alternately coaxing and flouting him, for all the world like a flesh-and-blood woman, until he had lost all the money which he could possibly lay hands upon in any reasonable time.

He was not an experienced gambler, and his voice shook a little as he arrested the next deal, and said, "What's in the bank?"

The dealer, Lord Sandymont, a youth who was busily engaged in gambling away a fair fortune he had lately inherited, looked up surprised.

He had never dreamed of such impertinence as that Jack Chillingham, a married younger son, one of the class that Sandymont associated with alpaca umbrellas and wide-toed boots, should dare to measure swords with him across the green cloth.

He, however, carelessly counted the gold, notes, and counters in a pile in front of him, and replied, "A little over two thou'. Better say two thousand five hundred. That'll be the bank."

There was a low murmur round the table, half of admiration of Sandymont's grand manner, half of impatience at Jack's delaying the deal.

"Banco!" said the latter.

Now let it be known to the uninitiated that this means, "I claim the bank from you, and will play you one game single-handed to see whether you keep it and take my money, or I take it and yours."

A low buzz succeeded this challenge. Sandymont whispered to his nearest neighbour, and the pause was awkward.

Jack understood it, and coloured painfully. "You need not be afraid of my not paying," he said. "I don't say I can give you the money to-night, Sandymont; but if I lose I can give you a cheque which you can present di-

rectly I have seen my banker. I have more than double this amount in the world."

Sandymont felt ashamed of himself.

"Nonsense, old fellow," he said. "I don't know what you're thinking of. We are all gentlemen here, I hope. So it's Banco, eh? Come on then!"

The cards were dealt. In Baccarat the object is to get nine. With three court cards you are "Baccarat," and lose.

Jack got five. Should he take another or no? The rule by which steady players are guided says "No." But Sandymont looked as if he had something good. He risked it. A five!

"Bac!" said he, trying to look cool and careless, but succeeding badly.

"Do you add that to the bank?" he asked.

"Might as well," answered the dealer, carelessly. "Yes, the bank, gentlemen, is now five thou'. Would any gentleman like to go Banco again?"

There was some bravado in this speech, for Sandymont was the heaviest player at The Buccaneer, and the stakes were getting higher than was usual even there.

"Go on, Sandy!" said Charlie Holster, who was anxious to begin again with his £10 counters. "Of course you can keep the bank. Go on!"

"Stop!" cried Jack. "Can one go Banco twice running?"

"As often as you like," said Sandymont, thinking the usual modestly-betting boy was drunk. "Do you want to?"

"Yes; I'll go you again."

"It's five thousand now, Chillingham," said a neighbour, in a warning voice.

"That'll make seven thousand five hundred you'll lose," said another.

"Or win," retorted Jack.

A hand was placed on his shoulder, and he looked round. It was Windermere.

"You're going too far, old chap," whispered the latter, leaning his hand on Jack's arm. "Don't be a fool. Banco for such sums with a fellow of Sandy's luck is perdition. I wouldn't try it, I know. Why not back out?"

Jack felt as if the hand on his shoulder scorched him, but he controlled himself, and only said in a low voice, "Leave me alone."

"I say, my dear fellow," went on Windermere, who thought that Jack had had too much champagne, and was good-naturedly anxious to keep him out of a scrape, "you ought to recollect that you're married, and have others——"

"Leave me alone, I say!" cried Jack, angrily, with a shrug of the shoulders.

The other held his peace, and stood there to watch the *denouement*.

"You really mean it?" asked Sandymont, who had been leaning back in his chair, amusedly watching the little scene between our hero and Windermere.

"I said Banco," answered Jack, laconically.

"Eight!" cried the dealer, triumphantly, throwing his two cards on the table.

Jack felt the beads of perspiration on his brow. He had two court cards. The third came slowly, as if Sandymont enjoyed his suspense. At present, ten not counting, Jack was nothing. There was but one card that could save him.

How clumsy the dealer seemed; what a time it was before he extracted the top card from the others; it appeared to be an age before it was turned up upon the table. Jack wondered that those nearest him were not startled by the noise his heart made.

That card perhaps meant ruin, dishonour (for Jack was now playing for rather more than he could pay); it might mean that he should remain for life in debt to Windermere, to the man who——

The card came down; it fell, through some clumsiness of Sandymont, face downwards, and Jack's trembling fingers could scarcely put it right.

A nine!

Sandymont twirled his moustache, but made no sign of annoyance. "A near thing, that," he observed, and called for a brandy-and-soda.

Jack with difficulty repressed a shout of delight.

"It's your bank," said Sandymont, rising; "or I'll go to banco with you if you like. But not unless you please."

"All right," said Jack. But two thousand more, and he must have won enough to pay Windermere everything; perhaps even to square accounts with the tradesmen.

"Five thousand in the bank," he said, trying to imitate Sandymont's cool air, "and, Sandy, your banco. Nine!"

"By Jove! you're in luck," murmured the ex-dealer. "I've had enough, and it's time for bed."

"I shall go too, I think," said Jack, rising, and feeling his limbs trembling beneath him. "Waiter, another cocktail."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Should all despair
That have revolted wives, the tenth of mankind
Would hang themselves.

Winter's Tale.

Letter from the Duke of CHESHIRE to Lady MELDRUM.

"MY DEAR LADY,

"It is many years since you and I were friends, but I think we neither of us have quite forgotten those days when we were foolish and didn't know it. What folly wisdom is, considering it can only get as far as to show us we are fools! I am growing old; you are a woman and cannot do so; still I believe I shall not be wrong when I venture to hint that you have reached that age when a woman can like and be kind to another woman. Am I not? And you can do a kindness now.

"That pretty little Alice Chillingham, in whom I know you take a great interest, is making a fool of herself, and not a soul about her, as far as I can make out, has taken the smallest trouble to stop her from running into the hole she has dug for herself.

"I have only just realized how far things have gone, and I am told—but this you will know best—that several people whose good opinion is of value have declared that whether the husband chooses to shut his eyes or not, they will receive her no more. Do you think you could do anything, my dear lady? You know W. very well, and I know of old that you are no coward. No man could speak to him on the subject, but a clever woman could. Will he drop it? That is the question. If he would I

believe we could save the child even now. You and I together surely could, if I turn eminently respectable and have bishops always in Maida Vale. Another thing I should like to know. Is he at all in earnest,—that is would he marry her if things came to the worst? I suppose not. I wouldn't have in his place. How differently one looks at things from outside certainly! I declare that my liking for this girl gives me nearly all the ridiculous feelings of a husband. I should hate to think of that pretty, fresh, innocent little creature, with the most *naturally* aristocratic manner I ever saw—so different to the hothouse article we know here—being thrown away like those we meet occasionally in a theatre-box or at a German watering place.

"From what I hear, she is desperately smitten with our friend W. (by-the-bye, he is certainly the most successful young fellow of the day, though, my dear lady, I fancy he would not have come up to the mark twenty years ago, eh?) and believes in him most thoroughly. Would it be of any use to shake that belief? You have tact and I am deficient in the article, or perhaps too lazy to draw upon the fund. I leave it to you, merely saying that if in recollection of old days you will do your best, you will confer a very great favour upon your old friend,

"CHESHIRE."

Lady Meldrum, on receipt of this epistle, at once sent for Windermere, who, rather surprised at the urgency of the old lady, at length was prevailed upon to go to B—— Square. She was not long in coming to the point.

"And so you are doing harm again, and more than ever this time, too," and she held up her fat finger in half-playful menace.

"I don't quite understand," said he, lazily leaning back in his chair, and speculating on her ladyship's weight.

"Oh, yes you do; you understand very well. I mean Mrs. C——"

"Mrs. C—— ?"

"Yes, *you* know."

"I know so many people whose names begin with C. There are the Calverleys, and the Comens, and the——"

"I mean Mrs. Chillingham."

"Ah, a nice little thing! American, you know, and fresh. Different to most. Oh, yes, I know her very well."

"Windermere," said she, with as much seriousness as she dared—he would be frightened away very easily, she felt—"you're doing more harm than you know there."

"Dear me, no," he said, stroking his soft moustache and speaking in a sentimental tone. "Dear me, no. She is doing more than *she* knows, you should say. I declare, Lady Meldrum, I'm desperately in love with little Alice."

"Are you, really."

"Of course. But what makes you so serious about it ?"

"I'm very fond of her."

"So am I."

"And yet you would ruin her!"

He looked at the old lady in surprise. There was no badinage in her voice now.

"Ruin her ?"

"Yes. Don't talk to me of the way of the world and what they all do. Because society has been vulgarised by a set of snobs who think it is fashionable to be vicious, or because a few fools in high places are so, is that any reason why intelligent ladies and gentlemen should behave like a set of third-rate French actresses and boulevard-strutters, or like the footmen and maids in their servants' halls ? But if only in that way, Windermere, it's bad enough. But I say that a man like you, who deliberately sets himself to seduce the wife of his friend, merely because she is innocent and fresh——"

Windermere was not accustomed to being lectured.

"He is not my friend," said he, sulkily. "He is not in my set."

"All the more reason for you to keep away from his house," cried her ladyship, rather illogically. "Tell me one thing," and she stood up in front of his chair, and held a large paper-knife over his head, as if prepared for physical force, if necessary—"tell me one thing—how will it all end?"

"How *am* I to know?" asked he, with half-comic perplexity, glancing at the formidable piece of ivory over his head.

"Who else is to know? Now, answer me one question. When the crash comes——"

"I don't see why any crash should come,"

"But I do. The husband is not like the most of them nowadays."

"Isn't he?" sneered Windermere.

"No; he is not. But he's a fool, and doesn't know you're a blackguard."

"Lady Meldrum!" cried he, springing to his feet, and regardless of the paper-knife.

"Yes—I repeat it; and you may call me out if you like. When that poor girl finds herself without a home, without a name, for your sake, what will you do?"

He was silent, meditating instant retreat, and the future avoidance of "this old madwoman's" company.

"Will you prove then that I am wrong in what I called you just now? Will you marry her?"

"Really——"

"Will you marry her?"

"I think, Lady Meldrum," said he, haughtily, and moving towards the door, "that you rather forget yourself."

"No, I don't!" screamed the old lady, in a passion, her "front" trembling with emotion. "No, I don't; but I should do so if I were to omit to tell you what you are,

if I were to omit to brand you with the name of coward and——"

But he had fled, and her ladyship, even in her wrath, remembered that after all he was not much worse than all the others, differing only in this respect that he was more successful.

"I am sure I did all I could," she thought to herself, as she whirled along in the high yellow barouche that afternoon; "but as to stopping such things as these, you might as well try to empty out the sea with a teacup."

* * * * * * *

When Jack got back to North Street after his lucky gamble it was broad day. He crept quietly upstairs to his dressing-room, his heart beating at the idea of his wife's waking and meeting him. As yet he had not made up his mind what to do. All he knew now was, that he had enough money to pay Windermere all he had paid for her, and what he had lent himself.

As he had his hand on the handle of his dressing-room door, his eye was caught by a note lying on the tray which held Alice's morning tea, and which her maid had laid down for a moment on a table on the landing. It was in Windermere's handwriting.

An irresistible impulse caused him to seize it and tear it open.

"My own Darling,

"I will call when J. is out this afternoon, and ——"

He read no more, but leant down his head upon the mantelpiece and groaned.

The first agony of seeing himself mentioned to Alice as an alien, as one to be got out of the way, was very sharp.

CHAPTER XXIX.

I lov'd a lasse, a faire one,
As faire as e'er was seen :
She was indeed a rare one,
Another Sheba queene :
But, foole as then I was,
I thought she lov'd me too :
And now, alas ! sh' 'as left me !
Falero, lero, loo.

MASTER WITHER.

"A NOTE for you," said Jack, entering Alice's room. She was in a *peignoir*—one that her husband had often admired—and looked singularly pretty with her soft hair falling on her shoulders, and her feet shod with the neatest of coquettish slippers.

She looked up inquiringly, and started as she saw the handwriting on the envelope.

"I have read it, Alice," he said in a low voice.

She did not speak for a moment. It had come then, the discovery, with its attendant shame, and all the horrors she had often pictured to herself.

"Forgive me, Jack !"

Jack stood still in front of her, the letter still in his hand.

"Had you not better read it ?"

But she could only cry out again—

"Forgive me !"

"Yes, I suppose I must. It is the fashion nowadays, they tell me, to forgive these things ; but——" and here his misery overcame his sarcasm. "Oh, Alice, I did not think *you* would have used me so."

She was almost choked by her emotion. To see Jack, whom she loved (in a way), who had trusted her so completely, with whom she had spent so many happy hours,

broken-hearted, and because of her, was terrible. At that moment her chief feeling was pity for him, joined with anger against that splendid scapegoat, Kate.

"Oh, Jack! I didn't know—I didn't mean—you could not think——"

He stopped her sternly.

"What could I not think? Have you not taken this man's money?"

There was no answer.

"Have you not received him unknown to me?"

No answer.

"Have you not been to his rooms?"

Upon her face came a look almost imperceptible, which seemed to be born of some sweet recollection.

Jealousy is keen-sighted, and Jack recognised it at once as such.

"You love this man?" he cried fiercely.

She looked up, and meeting the anger in his eyes, again contemplated her pretty slippers. The little white hand clenched itself as if for combat, and her breath came quickly.

"Do you love him?" cried her husband, again advancing close to her, in an almost menacing manner.

She met his gaze bravely enough this time, poor child, deeming herself to be loyal even in her dishonour.

"What would you have me say?"

"The truth. But still," he went on, as she was about to speak, "remember that what you say will decide our future. My happiness, at any rate depends on it. Alice! do not delude yourself. Remember how happy we have been together, how happy we might yet be, and do not let some passing fancy weigh against such love as you have known."

"I have been horrible, cruel, wicked; so bad that I deserve the worst you can do to me. But, oh, Jack, I do love him. He is so——"

"Stop!" cried Jack, huskily. "I can bear a good deal.

I have borne a good deal. But to hear from your lips that you—— I shall go mad!" and he paced the room in uncontrollable agitation.

She was the first to speak.

"Jack, please listen to me for a moment, and then do what you think best. When I met you first, and when you asked me to marry you, I had seen no one. I did believe then—I believed until—until three months ago, that all I had of love was yours; and then I found——"

"You found that, like all other women of your stamp, you wanted more than one lover!" cried poor Jack, desperate.

"No. You have a right to be angry. I cannot bear you to be sorry, for I am not worth it. I did not know for some time what my feelings were about *him;* and, believe me, Jack, I *did* try to stifle them. Do you remember when I asked you not to see so much of him?"

Jack assented with a groan. She, in the selfishness of love, was slowly tearing out his heart-strings.

"I *did* try and avoid him, ever so many times, and then—then I heard stories of you and that actress——"

"D——d lies!" muttered he.

"And, Jack, I am *not* like the women you compared me to just now. I know that it is only possible for me to love once."

"As you will say to the next person to whom you are good enough to transfer your affections. Oh, my God! why have I to bear this?" He leant his head upon the mantelpiece, and there was silence in the room for a time. at last he turned, and she thought she saw a trace of tears upon his cheek.

"Alice, my darling, my own, say that all this is a hideous dream, and let us wake now! You cannot have changed so utterly. I love you so much that you cannot do anything but love me in return. Say all this is false, that you have been a little foolish, flirted too much—done wrong, if it must be so. God help me! I would

forgive you all, for I love you too much to lose you! But for the love of heaven do not say that your heart has gone from me. Speak, darling; tell me you are still my own little wife!"

He had taken her in his arms and covered her face with kisses; while she remained cold and passive, but trembling in every limb.

"I will be a good wife to you," she said, slowly, and as if each word was an effort. "I will never see—him—again, if you order it, and——"

"You will say that you love me?"

"You know I am very fond of you."

"But you *love* him?" and he started up.

She did not answer.

"Answer me—I demand it as a right, and will be fooled no longer. Do you refuse to give up this schoolgirl sentiment for a blackguard who will throw you aside like an old glove when he has done with you, as he has all the others—for a man who has bought you with a few gowns and a few thousands—for a snob who goes about parading his marquisate before frisky matrons as a shopboy parades his sham diamond ring before shopgirls—for a——"

Jack scarcely knew what he was saying in his justifiable rage.

"Stop!" cried Alice, with her eyes flaming. "Stop! I have said I will obey your orders, and will promise you, although it will break my heart, never to see him again; but——"

"You own that! My God, this is too much! You own that it will break your heart not to see him! D——n you, you ——" and he used a word which we cannot write as he spoke it, and which we will not indicate by any of the pretty phrases now much in vogue to designate what is rapidly becoming a respectable—nay a fashionable class.

"You shall never say such words to me again!" cried she, drawing herself up.

He was mad from rage and mortification. Surely there was some excuse for him?

"Why not?"

"Because I will not stay with you to hear them."

"You only want an excuse to go to your *friend*."

"I want no excuse, and you know," she cried, looking very pretty as she confronted her angry husband, her eyes flaming and her cheeks flushed, "that I want no excuse. I have behaved badly to you. Until now you have been far too good to me, and I have repaid you by deception. I confess it. Do as you will about me; but remember one thing—I will not bear such words as you used just now."

"Alice," said he softening again—for the terror of losing her was strong within him—"I am sorry for what I said, but you drove me very hard when you said you —you cared about him."

"And what could I say? I have had enough of lying and trickery. I do love him, and I oughtn't to, and I can't help it."

"But not very much?" asked Jack, inviting more torture.

"Why do you force me to say such things?" she asked, half petulant, half pitying. "Why do you cross-examine me like this? Why not do what other people do in these cases?"

Alice's idea of the explosion had been quite different to this. She had expected ruin and desolation, and tragedy and blue fire, and all the concomitants of a domestic *esclandre*. And here was the injured one pleading as if he were in the wrong, and making her deliberately choose to step off the path and down the precipice, instead of falling over without a chance, and with no time to reflect on the inconvenience attached to the fall.

"I love him so much that if I were to lose him I should lose all the part of my life that makes life anything but

eating and drinking and sleeping. So much that nothing can ever come between my heart——"

"For God's sake, don't talk of *hearts*," interrupted Jack. "There are no such things in the bargain you have driven with his lordship. You spoke just now of 'the actress,' as you called her in your splendid disdain. Well, you know what she is. She is, I now see, a thousand times purer, better than you are. *She*, at least, can be loyal and true, and——"

"You had better go back to her," said Alice, with a touch of jealousy.

"Why not? She, at least, is honest. When she takes money there is no doubt about the reason. *She* hurts no credulous fool of a husband by doing so."

"I will not be insulted in this way!" cried Alice, with a stamp of her foot.

"Are you insulted? Why? Surely you insult yourself sufficiently by what you confess to me."

"Oh, Jack," and she turned to him with a gesture of despair, "I wish you were my brother and not my husband."

"It's a choice of evils," murmured Jack, sullenly.

"I want a friend, Jack, and you won't be one to me."

"No—I'm only your husband."

"Don't be so unkind. How could I help making a mistake? Have you never made any mistakes?"

"It appears I have made one very big one."

Alice was frightened by this unusual caustic tone. She drew nearer to him.

"Don't you care at all for me now?" she asked, holding out her hand.

Jack hesitated; then seized the little hand and drew her close to him.

"I love you!" he whispered in her ear. "I love you so that I would kill you before I'd let you be anyone else's! You have sworn to love me always, and you shall,

or at any rate you shall stay with me and let me love you!"

"And I must promise?" she asked, tremulously.

"Promise! What?"

"Never to see him again, never to——"

"Do you want to?"

"Once more!" she cried, breaking from his arms: "only once more, to say good-bye!" and she laid her head down on the arm of the sofa and wept bitterly.

Jack shivered from head to foot. In vain for him to try and persuade himself that this was no more than a passing fancy—a flirtation which the example of such friends as Mrs. Belfort had drawn her into.

"D——n him!" he cried. "Why should he have come between us? Shall you never forget him?"

"I will do all you wish," murmured Alice between her sobs.

"You will live with me and keep his memory in your heart! You will do what you call 'your duty,' and be as false as hell all the time! No! Go your own way! Dishonour yourself and me—perhaps it is fashionable—only go! I will not see you again. Thank God, we have no child to be cursed with the history of a bad mother! Go! This house is mine, and you who have deceived me had better follow your heart and leave it! When I come back I shall expect to find it rid of a woman whose presence is an insult to me!"

He hurried from the room, and, after a few hasty directions to his servant, from the house, leaving his wife to battle out as best she might, the fierce struggle between her duty and what she, poor ignorant child, conceived to be a higher obligation—the love of her heart.

How it would have ended may be considered doubtful, had not Windermere appeared in North Street that afternoon.

To strike while the iron was hot was his favourite axiom

where the other sex was concerned, and here he found the metal pliable enough. Alice did not tell him any details of the scene that had taken place, but he gathered enough to see that now was his grand opportunity. And he took it. Before the lamps were lit, the fatal "yes" had been said, and, while the respectable folk left in town were discussing their dinners, a young wife was bumping along towards Charing Cross Station in a four-wheeled cab, trying to believe she was happy, but only feeling that she was guilty.

CHAPTER XXX.

I meant no ill.
That which brought me hither
Was a desire I have to be with you
Rather than those I live with. This is all.

The Goblins.

Oh how mysterious is the bond
Which blends the earthly with the pure!

MARGARET DAVIDSON.

LADY MELDRUM'S flitting from B —— Square to the sunny South was a very impressive affair. Conscious, perhaps, of some want of dignity in her person, she was very careful to preserve as much as possible in her surroundings; and her butler had a larger white waistcoat, her hall-porter a redder nose, and her footmen more bulbous calves than those dignitaries in other establishments which attempted grandeur. And surely if it were incumbent on one of her ladyship's position to parade the evidences of rank and wealth before the limited public of London, it was still more so when the southern counties of England and the length of France were to be traversed? Part of this retinue consisted of his lordship, who sailed away from the English shore, where were his fat pigs and his beloved prize bullocks, with much the same feelings at his heart as saddened the fair Queen of Scots when going the reverse way.

He had never attempted rebellion, for he was a weak man, easily overborne, and his wife was no ordinary foe. She was fond of him in a brusque, rather cruel fashion, and suffered no one to bully him but herself. She fain would have him by her as a sort of *roi fainéant*, or, we might say, invisible deity, which she, as high priest, could

manipulate in her own way, but which still should be a deity to others. When she talked pompously of "my lord" and "his lordship's wishes," persons who had never seen him were rather awed; and Mr. Flittery did not forget for some time the reception of a joke of his at my lord's expense met with at his wife's hands. It nearly cost poor Flittery the run of one of the "best houses" in London.

The arrival of the cavalcade from B—— Square at Charing Cross created some stir even at that busy place. An American "belle" would have stared at the amount of large black boxes there were there, guarded by maids, footmen, and couriers of every nationality, and all in various stages of fuss and fury. A King Charles' spaniel, a parrot, and a most obnoxious monkey added all they could to the confusion; while my lady, very red in the face in consequence of a hastily-swallowed meal before starting, stood in the middle, alternately giving excited instructions to one or other of her domestics, petting and soothing the animals, and saying an affectionate farewell to the friends who had come, as in duty bound, to see her off.

"Good-bye, dear! Write all the news! Villa Gorgoni, you remember—Villa Gorgoni, Nice—not Nizza, now—it's French, you know, and very wrong it was of Napoleon. Amélie, what on earth are you doing? Don't you see those rugs are on Jock's head?—he'll be crushed, poor dear! Why, where *are* they putting my luncheon-basket? In the other carriage, you stupid man! Oh yes, yes! I'll tell you all that happens there; and there's always something amusing happens at Nice. Gambling and love-making go together, I think. Poor little Topsy! Never mind, then! Did the nasty man tread on his tail? Amélie, where have you put those meat biscuits? No, not those!—the new sort Mr. Flittery got me the other day. Can't find them! Well I won't start without them. Put them in my small bag, did I? Impossible! Oh yes, here they are! Train going? Dear me,

why it wants at least five minutes to the time! Good-bye, dearest! Mind you write! That woman who passed us just now has a pretty figure, but I didn't see her face. Why, there's Windermere! I wonder where he's going! Take care, John!—*that's* not the way to take up Topsy! I *will* not have her taken up by the neck!"

"We *must* start the train, my lady," says the guard, in desperation.

"Quite right, guard—of course you must. Unpunctuality is the source of all danger. Would you just take hold of Jock's chain? He won't bite; my maid seems to have forgotten him. Amélie, take Polly in the carriage with you. Mind, Thomas is to come and find out if I want anything at each station. Oh, inspector!—do you think there is any wind? Will the sea be smooth?"

But the bowing official could not reassure her voluble ladyship, for as she spoke the train glided out of the station.

In another carriage of the same train were seated two travellers, man and woman, both of whom seemed to be rather absorbed in reflections.

Even in these days of broad-mindedness, running away from your husband is rather an important matter, and Alice, although we can find no excuse for her, was not of the mould of those ladies who change their lovers nearly as often and more easily than they change their gloves. She had that "moral sense" which seems so uselessly annoying when it has failed to deter us from the commission of a fault, and it—*conscience* some call it—was worrying her most terribly now.

The other affair of this sort that Windermere had had—to do him justice there had been but one before—was so different. Then the lady had laughed and joked, and wondered pleasantly what *he* (a deceived husband is always spoken of as "he," just as a corpse is "it") would say when her flight was discovered. She had called for

"B. and S." at one of the stations, and had insisted on smoking a cigarette on the bridge of the steamer.

Now the lady was all tears and tremor, and poor Windermere began at last to feel as if he were a bridegroom trying to console his school-room bride for her parting with "mamma and sisters."

"I can't see why you came, if it makes you so unhappy already," he said at last, rather petulantly.

The reply was femininely inconsequent.

"*You*, at least, ought to be the last to reproach me."

"I don't, darling—of course I don't—what I mean is that if we are going to be miserable——"

"How can I be anything else?" she asked, raising her tearful eyes. "I believe Jack will die. I do indeed. He was so fond of me, Clare!"

"And you regret it already, then?"

He spoke huffily. Had he lost his hunting, and put himself to much inconvenience for this?

"I don't know. Everything seems to be all wrong."

"I suppose you don't care about me any more. It's a pity you didn't find it out two hours ago."

"Oh, I do! You know I do. Should I be here else? You're not quite kind, Clare. I am giving up everything a woman prizes for you—my name, my home, my husband——"

"Really, Alice," said he, lighting a cigar, and puffing viciously at it, "we can't go into the matter in this way. Your husband is——"

"The best, kindest man in the world!"

"Look here; let us be serious. When the train gets to Dover it will be perfectly possible for you to go back to him. You know how dearly I love you; but don't think for a moment, Alice, that I am base enough to take advantage of you in any way; but, of course, if you go back now, my dream of happiness is shattered. Can you not believe I will make you happy, darling?"

"Forgive me, Clare," said she, "I am a fool. I know

I cannot live without you; but I do wish I hadn't been obliged to treat poor Jack so badly."

Then Windermere, thinking that affairs had better rest on this footing, said no more, except such words as are inspired by folly and love, real or feigned, and poor little Alice forgot for the moment her remorse and fears, and allowed herself to be happy in the ridiculous belief that "love is enough" to carry the pilgrim through life's dangers.

All for love and the world well lost.

It is sad to think that any sane adult person should ever have believed in such an immoral axiom.

They drove straight across Paris, and took the morning train to Marseilles, again at the station meeting the Meldrum party. Alice shrank back when she saw her ladyship's portly form, and again escaped recognition, although the gold-rimmed eye-glass was very busy to discover whether Windermere was alone or not.

And now a catastrophe occurred which was important in its consequences, although seemingly of no great moment at the time. Windermere, who had a dim aristocratic notion that time was scarcely made for such as he, disregarding the fact that they had but ten minutes at Lyons, determined on a thorough toilet, and had the satisfaction, when about half clad, of hearing the train leave the station. Even for Lord Windermere they could not bring it back. So there was nothing for it but to follow by a slow train that started in a few hours, or await the next express. He determined on the latter course, and sent a telegram to the station at Marseilles, telling Alice which hotel to go to and await his arrival. His *nom de voyage* was Mr. Keswick (this being the second title in his family), and so his telegram was addressed to "Madame Keswick."

It did not strike him that he had omitted to tell Alice of this change of name, and that therefore his message was not very likely to find her.

Alice's dismay at finding herself dashing south alone may be imagined, and her utter helplessness on arriving at Marseilles was piteous to behold. She had been kept awake all night by her thoughts, and the excitement which had hitherto sustained her was fast dying away. The disappearance of her companion was the last straw, and she fairly broke down in the *salle d'attente* as she realized the fact that she had forgotten her purse—or perhaps purposely left it behind, not wishing to take anything that might be Jack's—and had no notion where to go or what to do. Windermere's servant had been assisting in his master's toilet, and was also left behind.

"Mrs. Chillingham!" said a voice at her side, and she turned to encounter the astonished gaze of Lady Meldrum.

"Yes—I—that is——"

"Child!" cried her ladyship, excitedly, not heeding the looks of curiosity around. "Child, what are you doing? Is Mr. Chillingham here?"

Alice turned to escape, but the stout old lady held her arm.

"No," she cried; "you shall not go—at least, not till I have told him what I think. Where is Lord Windermere?"

She spoke sternly, and Alice, wearied out with excitement and bodily fatigue, was no match for her.

"He was left behind accidentally at Lyons," she stammered out, "and I was going to——" But at this moment nature gave way, and she sank back fainting on to one of benches that lined the room.

"Amélie, quick! my salts. Now then, look up dear: that's better! You must come to my hotel. John, is the *fiacre* there? Now, my good man, stand out of the way. Don't you see the lady is ill? Give her your arm on the other side, Amélie. There! that'll do. She'll be quite well in a minute. *Cocher, à l'Hôtel de l'Univers! Vite!* Drive on! Now, my Lord of Windermere, we'll see whether a stupid old woman cannot checkmate you for once. Was there ever such a lucky meeting!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

> This soul hath been
> Alone on a wide, wide sea :
> So lonely 'twas that God Himself
> Scarce seemed there to be.
>
> *Ancient Mariner.*

SCARCELY knowing where he was going, already broken-hearted at having used such bitter words to the woman he could not help loving, Jack found himself in Brompton, and was soon seated in Violet Vandeleur's *bijou* house. Before he had told her much, she guessed the whole truth, and overflowed with compassion and such advice as her experience of the narrow world in which she lived had given her. And the world behind the foot-lights is not a bad parody of that in front.

The "paying public" are perhaps a little less jealous, a trifle less conceited and egotistical, than the *artistes* whose success to a great extent depends upon their conceit and egotism. The grand object in life, as on the stage, is to stand on your friend's shoulders for the better reaching of the topmost branch, and to give that friend a kick downwards when the branch is firmly grasped, and he can be of no further use. Violet had had to fight her way to her little eminence like the rest, and was naturally hardened and unrefined by the process : but, surviving all her *cancans* and *double entendres*, displays of legs and of temper, chaff with semi-drunken spring captains, and mean shifts to gain the advantage of a rival, she possessed a true woman's heart in her bosom still ; and was, moreover, far more impressed by a catastrophe in the ranks above her kin than she would have been by the direst occurrence among those with whom she lived.

When Tibbs the comedian deplored the loss of his wife, who had preferred the aristocratic company of a heavy dragoon, Violet looked upon it as an excellent joke; but that the Honorable Jack Chillingham should meet a similar fate was terrible indeed.

Jack's chivalrous manner to herself, and apparent ignorance of the fact that courtesy is not required for such as she, had made a great impression upon her; and, if it was impossible for her to be what is called "in love" with anyone, she cared so much for him that, in his presence, she felt ashamed of herself, abjured strong liquors, and rarely if ever let slip an oath out of her pretty mouth.

"Don't give up, Jack!" she cried. "It may all come right. You know she does like you best, and then——"

"But I know nothing of the kind," he said moodily. "I would have gladly laid down my life for her; and this is my reward."

Violet thought she had heard words something like this on the stage; but only said, "She could not be so cruel."

"Cruel! For inhuman cruelty, give me a woman who knows that a man loves her—that she is sure of him, let her do what she may. But, by God, she shall see that I am not so helpless as she thinks!" cried he, knowing that he was talking nonsense. "She shall go her own way and I mine, and I don't care if I never see her false face again."

"Yes, you do, Jack," said the actress, gently. "Yes, you do, my poor boy. You can never live without her."

"Can I not! You shall see," he began; but the words died upon his lips, and he buried his face in his hands with a groan.

Violet laid her hand gently upon his shoulder—a pretty hand, not so white as Alice's, except when powdered for performances, but pretty, and not plebeian.

"Jack, my friend, I am only a poor actress whom all play with and despise; but I like to think I can be your

friend—at a distance, of course, but still your friend. If this is as you say—if all is really over between you and your wife, still do not let it spoil your life. Believe me, Jack, there is no woman that ever breathed worth such a sacrifice. I daresay we are all much alike. Human nature is not very different in Belgrave Square to what it is in Brompton. Only in Belgrave Square they hide it, and we don't. If she had loved you she could not have done this; if she did not love you, surely it is best the discovery should come. Should you like to go on with a woman who was shamming to you all the while?—whose every kiss was a lie? With one of *us*—well, you buy us, you know, and you are aware pretty well of the value of the article—but with one of your great people it must be truth or a perpetual sham and falseness."

"What matter, if one thought it was true?" asked Jack, unconsciously repeating Othello's cry of agony.

"But you would not really think it was true; at least not for long. A hundred little things would show you its falseness every day, and the attempt to make yourself believe you were happy would soon cease. No, Jack; the fact is sad enough, but that it should be known as a fact is all the better."

"You are rather a Job's comforter, Violet."

"Am I? I don't remember much about Job; but if our stage-manager had a little of his character I think I should like him better. But now, Jack, will you take my advice for once? Go back to North Street, and make certain you and she are not deceiving yourselves. Do!"

"I must see her once more," he said, rising, and moving to the door without looking round. "Yes, I will go back. She shall say all that again to me if she can. If I could only wake and find it all nothing but a bad dream! Do you know, Violet," he continued, with his hand on the door, "I sometimes cannot believe it *is* I who am so wretched, remembering how only a few days ago I was the happiest fellow in London."

"Poor dear Jack?" sighed she, as he went out, and a sudden eagerness coming over him, promised a cabman an extra fee to drive quickly to North Street.

There was no Alice there. He supposed she had gone out driving, and sat down in the drawing-room to wait, A pretty little room, with marks of Alice's artless taste and refinement everywhere. The little sketch she had done at Montbec, on the wall, recalled to him the happiest moments of his life. Her work lay upon the table, and he took it and pressed it to his lips. As he laid it down, he became aware of a letter addressed to him, which was near it on the table. Surely it was her handwriting? She had written to tell him that the cruel words said that morning were false; that she was only trying him; that her love was his and not another's. He tore open the envelope—there was a forget-me-not upon it, which he remembered distinctly afterward, as one often notes trifles in moments of intense excitement—and read:

"Forgive me! Forget me! I was not worthy of your love. I am a wretched, wicked woman. Nothing you can say is bad enough. But try and forgive me some day, and do not grieve the loss of one who is——what you said just now. Good-bye.

"ALICE."

Two hours afterwards Alice's maid, surprised at the absence of her mistress, came to the drawing-room and found Jack seated there, with a letter in his hand, gazing into the fire. She had to address him several times before he became aware of her presence.

"Mrs. Chillingham returns to dress?" she asked.

"Returns! returns! Never," said Jack, as one in a dream.

Perkins confided to the man-servant that master seemed quite odd-like, as if he had seen a ghost. Perhaps in the declining fire he did see the ghost of his hap-

pinoss! As night came on, and no blandishments on the servant's part could induce him to dine; and as their mistress still did not come back, an inkling of the truth began to ooze out. It was not long in reaching next door; it travelled from downstairs to my lady's chamber mysteriously in many houses that night; and next morning it was pretty well known in London that a new amusement was to be provided for scandal-lovers; and while male old women ran from club to club collecting and inventing savoury details, austere ladies, whose only virtue consisted in not having as yet broken the Eleventh Commandment, cast up their splendid eyes, and hinted how they had known it would end in this way many months ago.

Strange to say, much blame fell to the share of the victim; and if there were but a tithe of truth in what was said of Jack, he must have been a very Chevalier de Faublas in his code of morals, and have possessed the wealth of the Indies to keep up the numerous establishments with which he was credited.

"D——n it all!" said Sir John Glorme, in the bow window of his club, "I can stand a good deal. No fellow can call me strait-laced; but, by Jove! young Chillingham is too bad. I shall cut him if he presumes to go into society again."

And the general club public rather agreed with this new champion of comparative morality. Windermere alone came out of the ordeal of social criticism without a stain upon his character. Women one and all became eager to know him better, and many a young gentleman whose "only wish was woman to win" cursed in his heart the fortune which had not given him Windermere's position and talent for conquest.

Lord Brocklesby had come up to town to have his hair cut—at least this was the reason he gave his wife and family—and, hearing the news, drove off at once to North Street.

The old gentleman was more seriously put out than he had been since the Government refused to adopt a Reform Bill he had concocted in a stray half-hour after dinner, and was inclined to be angry with his son for allowing Alice to prove his predictions concerning her to prove false.

"It must have been your absurd jealousy," he said.

"Jealousy! But I'm not going to argue about it with you, father. The thing has happened—too late to ask why."

And not all his father's ingenious theories concerning matrimony, and schemes for the prevention for the future of such occurrences as this, could move him from the strange state of lethargy into which he had fallen. His mind was so entirely absorbed by his loss, by thoughts of her, that he could spare no thought on anger with the man. That would come; but at present the killing of twenty Windermeres seemed so insignificant beside the loneliness, the lovelessness, to which he was condemned. For two days he did not stir from his house; his father was fain at last to return to the country, piteously lamenting the times gone by when a man was quick to avenge his dishonour with a ready pistol.

At last he roused himself and crawled to Scotland Yard.

"Yes, sir!" said the smug detective, washing his hands in the air. "No doubt we shall be able to ascertain where they are very shortly. The gentleman is pretty well known by sight, you see, sir. Can you let me have a photo of the lady? If you have one about you now, so much the better, as we can commence inquiries at once."

Poor Jack hesitated, and then, with trembling hand, drew out a large locket which he wore round his neck and gave it to the man.

"Ha! very pretty, very nice," said he, opening it as he would have opened a box of cigars, while Jack could have murdered him for profaning it by his touch.

"May I ask, sir, whether this is at all flattered? Ladies sometimes, you know——"

"Not in the least," said Jack, shortly, clenching his fists. "You will take care of that, please. I—I—set some value on it, and should not like to lose it."

"Most careful, sir; rely on us. If you will call again in about two days, I have no doubt we shall have a perfect case for you."

A perfect case! Jack groaned as he thought of his little Alice being part of a detective's "perfect case!" Probably he might have ascertained where they had fled without resorting to Scotland Yard; but he shrank from speaking to or seeing a friend, and found it easier to put the facts before a stranger than to listen to the condolences of Badsworth or Keyser. One little note he received that day did give him some comfort, he scarcely knew why.

It was from Lady Eleanor Stonegrave, and said, "Do not be too unhappy, dear Mr. Chillingham; I for one do not believe it is true, and I do believe you will find there has been some terrible mistake."

A very shocking thing for an unmarried girl to write about, or know anything of, such a matter; but then this one was rather unconventional, and was too fond of her brother, Badsworth, to refuse him anything; and he thought, not wrongly, that one line of condolence from a good woman will do more than a dozen pages from the dearest of male friends.

The detective had little occasion to use his abilities, for that very evening Jack received the following telegram:

"From Lady MELDRUM, Villa Gorgoni, Nice.

"Alice is with me. Left London under misconception. Come and join her here."

The night-mail carried one passenger whose eagerness to get on could not be satisfied by the speed any engine might attain to; and much wrath and confusion was created at The Buccaneer Club the same night by the appearance of Windermere, calm and collected, looking utterly unlike an eloper.

CHAPTER XXXII.

Voyez vous, ma chère, au siècle où nous sommes,
La plupart des hommes
Sont très inconstants.
Sur deux amoureux pleins d'un zèle extrême,
La moitié vous aime
Pour passer le temps.

DE MUSSET.

THE quiet of Lady Meldrum's darkened *salon* in the Villa Gorgoni was a relief to Alice after the intense excitement of the past forty-eight hours. She as yet shrank from making inquiries as to how she got there, where Windermere was, or how much Lady Meldrum knew. From some little peculiarity in her ladyship's manner, a soft gravity very unusual with her, she however conjectured that her story was pretty well known. Still it was not until the next day that curiosity mastered a shrinking to enter upon the subject, and she said:

"How kind and good you are to me, Lady Meldrum. I'm sure I don't know why. Has—has any one called to see me?"

"My child," said the latter, plumping suddenly down on a chair beside the sofa on which Alice was propped up by skilfully-arranged pillows; for she was still weak—worn out by excitement; "my child, some one *has* called. He took some time discovering where you were; and he shall take still longer to see you—if I can prevent him."

"Oh, Lady Meldrum! I must; that is, I——" It was rather a difficult sentence to finish.

"You have done a foolish, wicked thing, Alice Chillingham," said Lady Meldrum, severely, "and Providence has interposed to save you against your will."

"But my promise——"

"Such promises are made honourable by the breaking of them. You have promised, child! What?. To break your husband's heart, to disgrace his family—not that I care twopence about *them*—and to cast yourself out for life from the companionship of honest folk. Do you know what people will call you?"

Alice covered her face with her hands, and moaned piteously. Even in the midst of her grave thoughts she could not help remembering that her position was somewhat ridiculous.

"I can't help it. The thing is done now."

"No dear. The thing is *not* done. You have simply come a sudden journey to Nice with your friend, Lady Meldrum (who is fond of you, notwithstanding all your naughtiness), because of a silly quarrel about your bread-and-butter with your husband. You preferred it thin, he thick; and so——"

"Oh no, no! You don't know all. I can never go back now."

"Yes, you can, and shall. I don't suppose *he* will be such a scoundrel as to talk; and not a soul can tell you didn't come with me. I don't suppose anyone will dare to disbelieve *me*." And the old lady drew herself up, and looked very fierce. "Besides, I have taken other measures to put an end to this folly."

"What measures?" asked Alice, anxiously.

"I have telegraphed to your husband."

"To Jack!"

"Yes, to Jack," said Lady Meldrum, good-naturedly mimicking her tone of horror. "Would it be so very dreadful to you to see him?"

"Oh yes—at least—with *him* here."

"You think they will shoot each other. Dear no, my poor child. Men don't think us worth risking their skins for us nowadays. At any rate, I don't think there is cause for alarm, however sanguinary our ill-used Jack may be, for he can hardly fight a duel from an express train

with a man in another express train going in an opposite direction."

"What do you mean?" cried Alice, starting up.

"Lie still—you're too weak to get up, you see—and I'll tell you. I mean simply that Lord Windermere returns by the evening train, to-day, and that I expect Mr. Chillingham about three hours later."

"But I must see Clare, I must——"

"That you certainly shall *not*," said her ladyship, grimly; evidently prepared, if necessary, to use force for the carrying out of her scheme.

Alice, pale and languid on the sofa, and torn by conflicting emotions, certainly did not appear very difficult to control just then; and Lady Meldrum, as she looked upon her fair form and great wondering eyes, felt herself quite the mistress of the situation. Much as she talked about and laughed over the details of elopements and such like events that add piquancy to the London season, she had never been actually mixed up with one before; and the pleasure of this thought was only marred by the conviction that, even to her most intimate friends, silence on the subject would be for ever necessary. Windermere's departure she had achieved by admitting him to an interview with herself, and then declaring that Alice was so ill that it was out of the question that he should see her; by stopping and burning promptly the impassioned note which he had caused to be conveyed to her; by announcing to him that Alice had entirely repented, and had telegraphed for her husband; and by showing him distinctly what an absurd position he would be placed in did he remain there to face a husband who would not only horsewhip him, but who had also, so declared Lady Meldrum, cut him out.

Windermere had a decided objection to violence. Courageous enough in principle, he was of a prudent mind when detail came to be considered; and, it must be admitted, that to be cudgelled or shot without the satisfac-

tion of having anything tangible to be cudgelled or shot for, is an unnecessary inconvenience.

Above all things he disliked and feared anything in the shape of ridicule. As other men seek glory, honour, goodness, or superiority of any kind, so he sought, as his life's object, the conquest of women; and he knew full well that a woman will pardon anything—crime, duplicity, or cruelty—before she will pardon ridicule.

Souvent celuy qui demeure
Est cause de son mischef:
Celui qui fuit de bonne heure
Peut combattre derechef.

Impressed with this truth, he thoughtfully retraced his steps from the Villa Gorgoni. The position was too awkward to be maintained; Alice was doubtless a nice little thing, and much enamoured of him, and it was certainly very aggravating to have the cup then dashed from his lips; but if he clung to it there was a chance of losing the sipping of many other cups almost equally sweet. Alice had certainly been the beauty of the past season, and he had been much envied, and would be more so if he persevered. Should he stay on and brave all. It certainly was d——nably hard on him. But then there was Chillingham, a determined looking fellow and a barbarian; one who did not know the ways of society, or what to do in such cases as this, but who was quite capable of knocking him down, or giving him a black eye on the *Promenade des Anglais*. That would be insupportable. The idea of travelling about with the lady and a swollen nose, or bones too much bruised to hobble, was insupportable. Yes; a return to England and the delights of the shires was the only thing, and he ordered his valet to take tickets for that night's train.

On Alice—except as regarded himself and his own vanity—he did not bestow a thought. What she might feel never entered into his calculations. Indeed, he was

conscious of a mild anger against her for having in some wise been the cause of all this inconvenience. That he had been hardly treated he felt; and he was not accustomed to hard treatment.

Thus, while Alice sobbed her heart out on Lady Meldrum's sofa in the darkened, scented room, and pictured her lover's misery, and groaned over her involuntary falseness to him, and tried to nerve herself—urged thereto by her good-natured hostess, to stifle the love of her young heart—Lord Windermere lay back comfortably in his railway carriage reading a French novel, and planning in his mind ever and again some of those little entertainments which pass away so pleasantly, and often so profitably, to men of his kind, the long winter evenings in London, when the earth is as hard as iron, and the foxes are perforce allowed a temporary respite.

And in another train, tearing in the darkness along the lovely shore of the tideless sea, came one with heart and brain on fire with revived hope, with love that seemed to go stronger from every rebuff. Never did journey appear so long as did this one to Jack Chillingham. In vain he set himself to solve the mystery of her disappearance, the reason for her having written that wild, guilty note; he could think of nothing but the delight of clasping her lissome form again in his arms, of pressing his lips again to hers.

An old Frenchman and his wife, who were in the same carriage with him, chuckled and whispered to each other, amused at his impatience and restlessness, and wove a charming romance, of the Parisian sort, thereon. How they would have stared had they known that this was a husband, and a husband placed in the position of husbands in French comedy from time immemorial!

Perhaps, however, even this would not have surprised them; for, they might have said, the English are almost mad enough to be fond of their own wives.

"She is not well—knocked up by the journey," said

Lady Meldrum to him in the hall of the villa. "Don't startle her, and don't mind much what she says. I know you had a quarrel, and you must make it up. There, go upstairs, my dear boy, and give her a kiss."

The southern twilight was just disappearing as Jack entered the *salon,* and it was nearly dark. Trembling with suppressed emotion, and forgetting everything except that he loved her and was near her, he groped his way to the sofa.

"My darling!" he said, as he put his arm around her and drew her to him.

"Clare! Is that you? Oh, my love, I am so glad!"

At that moment a servant entered with the lamp, and Alice saw her husband standing before her with an expression in his face which neither she nor any one else had ever yet seen there.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

If Love be rough with you, be rough with Love ;
Prick Love for pricking, and you beat Love down.

Romeo and Juliet.

And still she sobbed, "Not for the pain at all,"
She said, "but for the Love, the poor good Love
You gave me,"—so she cried herself to sleep.

D. G. Rossetti.

"I DON'T believe a word of the story," said pretty Lady Newmarket, *facile princeps* in the most select of circles ; "and even if there were some truth in it, I don't see what reason we have for making ourselves disagreeable. If she *did* run away from her husband—well, he ran after her and caught her, and didn't seem to mind ; and as to Windermere having gone with her, that must be all nonsense, for he was in London, to my certain knowledge, at the very time she arrived at Nice. There certainly was some mystery, my dear ; and she did not *go* with old Malaprop, whatever she may say. Still, we have nothing to do with all that. I rather like a woman to have a history, and *I* intend to know her."

This about settled the question of Alice's position in the smart world, for Lady Newmarket was certainly at the top now, despite her doubtful birth and insatiableness in flirtation, and her words for the present were law. Of course, many had wagged their heads and been scornful when the appetising cup of scandal was dashed from their lips at the last moment—and in the dead season of the year too—by the tale written adroitly home by Lady Meldrum ; and some incredulous ones, resolutely refusing to allow their pleasure to be balked by such paltry affairs as dates, still declined to see in Alice's sudden journey to

France, anything but an elopement with Lord Windermere.

Indeed, particulars were not wanting of the meeting of the lover and the husband, of a cudgelling, of a duel, of fearful wounds, of showing of the white feather, of the faithless wife's tears and lamentations, and of the ultimate triumph of legitimate virtue. According to some, Jack had demanded £10,000, and had eventually been content to accept dishonour for half that sum. Others declared, on the contrary, that after receiving a tremendous drubbing, Windermere had refused to stand a shot, but had incontinently fled by special train, obtained at enormous expense, and only after much influence had been brought to bear on the French Cabinet; while perhaps the favourite story was that Alice, having a dark lover at Nice, had only taken advantage of the noble lord's purse and escort to meet him, and had dismissed her temporary protector on arrival at the station.

Whatever the truth might be, Windermere's associates all remarked that he had returned to Melton in anything but a jubilant state of mind, and that for a week after he rode much harder than was his wont—for he was ordinarily very careful of his person, and if splenetive, could not be accused of rashness.

Alice and Jack spent their winter in the South; they both felt that the old life in North Street could not again be faced just yet; and amid the thousand joys of Italy, her blue sky, her orange trees and lovely mountains, and bursts of song and melody, and dreams of heaven caught for us by kings of men and preserved on canvas, and visions of beauty perpetuated in fair marble, they tried to forget that for both of them life had suddenly lost most of its attractions, that the play had suddenly ceased, and nothing but a long vista of hopeless work, with a grave at the end of it, had taken its place.

Twenty times a day did Alice vow to herself that, come what might, there was one thing left for her, one object

she had in the world—to do her duty. It was cold and comfortless no doubt, and her life henceforth was to be lit by no ray of sun; but there it was staring her in the face, and she would meet her fate unflinchingly. Some little comfort perhaps she unconsciously derived from a vague notion of martyrdom; an idea that she, poor child, was somehow for the good of society sacrificing herself, laying her bleeding heart upon the altar of conventionality and decorum; and once or twice, while musing over the perfections of her lover, she caught herself wondering whether many women could be so good, so virtuous, as she. Her task was more difficult now than it had been; for Jack, cut to the heart every minute of the day by some new evidence of her estrangement from him, had become morose, even at times savage, when in her company. She did try to love him in the way he wished, so much, so vainly! and he saw the attempt and recognized the failure, and was made angry by both; while she, with some of that unreason which ill-natured males attribute to her sex, felt angry with him because she could not succeed in her laudable attempts. To an observer they would have appeared a happy couple, who had got over all that bubbling affection which is so annoying to lookers-on, and were content to glide through life side by side without any disagreeable friction. They were both too full of what they considered great woes to carp at trifles, or to cause any of those petty scenes which make life seem often so mean a thing. Jack was silent and moody certainly; and when alone with his wife, as we have said, his ways were almost fierce; but so many Englishmen, particularly when travelling on the Continent, with hotel bills to pay, and tickets to take, and bargains to be made in strange tongues, *are* moody, sometimes even fierce, that this alone would scarcely lead you to suspect there was anything serious to divide him from his wife. Of course, as he had daily evidence that what she had confessed to him was true, that she had

made a mistake when she thought she loved him, so much the more unreasoningly and passionately did he worship her shadow; and the continual struggle within him, lest he should fall at her feet and ask her to trample him, and let him grovel always so in the light of her eyes, even though these eyes lightened at another's name, would have worn out a better temper and more patience than he possessed.

When towards the middle of April they at last turned their steps homeward, after a winter that seemed ages to both, and with mixed feelings prepared to pass through another of those bustling orgies called London seasons, instead of a bright, careless boy, credulous, and therefore happy, there accompanied the beautiful Mrs. Chillingham, about whom so many tales were told, and for whose face on his canvas so many painters longed, and in whose honour so many dandies gave an extra twirl to their moustache, a sad, depressing, and certainly sullen-looking man.

Alice would have been more than human—and she was very human, poor child!—had she not wished to see Windermere again. Only in the distance, that she might be certain she could face him without a tremor; to see, too, that he was happy, and had—this was a difficult thing to wish—forgotten her and their wicked journey, and all she had promised him. And as they drove from the station through a blinding snow-storm, and she gazed dreamily out of the window with that rapt look which speaks of strong feeling, Jack knew her thoughts, and writhed with pain, with humiliation, with resentment, and above all with a deep sense of self-pity. A heart is such an intangible thing, there is no laying hold of it and keeping it. Strength is no use, cajolery of no account. Reasonless, it goes whither it will, and we may whistle ourselves black in the face ere it will return. Not being able even to keep the one in our own bosom, it would assuredly seem foolish to assume, as we so often do, that we can keep that

which beats in another's. The unreasonableness of a heart, too, is so great that, although we have both archbishops to perform the marriage ceremony, and throw into it twenty bridesmaids, showers of old shoes, cabinet ministers to make speeches, and the biggest cake and greatest number of presents ever known, it will perhaps fly off a few months afterwards in a totally wrong direction, and cause all sorts of pain and annoyance to all sorts of most respectable, nay, even sometimes to most high-born people.

If Jack could only have philosophised a little he might possibly have cured himself, but philosophy is, with most of us, only a fair-weather guide, and to feel keenly was all the art known by our unfortunate hero.

The piles of bills neatly laid out upon the hall-table did not constitute an agreeable welcome to North Street, and many minor misfortunes, such as the cook's absence without notice, the man-servant's too-evident booziness, and the smoking of newly-lit fires, added to the general discomfort and dreariness of that first night "at home." Then of course there were no newspapers, and Jack's stock of cigars was run out, and the key of the cellar had been put in so safe a place that no one could find it; and the snow fell doggedly outside, and, thawing as it fell, made locomotion either on foot or on wheels almost an impossibility. Alice's temper had been a little ruffled by the loss of a box, coming immediately after the derangement incidental on the rough Channel passage; and Jack, who would not have owned to sea-sickness for the world, was certainly none the better for the tossing they had experienced. As he sat in his little den that night, without pipe or book to keep him from his thoughts, his greatest enemy, if he had one, might have accorded him pity; while Alice, with her flushed cheek on the pillow, tears stealing down her cheeks, tried to sleep, and, while vowing she would be true to her duty, sobbed for the recollection of her love.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

As all things mourn awhile
At fleeting blisses,
Let us, too; but be our dirge
A dirge of kisses.

KEATS.

MRS. BELFORT happened to be in town when our two travellers returned; and, as at this early period, before the Derby had collected the usual crowd to take part in the town festivities, London was rather dull, she came often to North Street, and resumed her intimacy with Alice, which the course of events had rather broken off. Alice, hungering for sympathy which she was afraid as well as ashamed to demand from anybody else, had so low an estimate of Mrs. Belfort's capabilities in the way of British *shockableness*, that no more agreeable society could at this juncture have been provided her. To Mrs. Belfort's mind a lover was as much a necessity of a pretty woman as a cloak in cold weather or a fan at the opera; and, innocent of all reasoning, her instincts brought her straight to the same result as regards the use and duties of husbands which has been so often attained, after pages of sentiment and copious philosophic dissertation, by legions of French novelists. Alice's story, or as much of it as she could extract from that blushing rebel against the Eleventh Commandment, filled her with pious wrath. She felt much as a Lord of the Admiralty would feel were a brand-new ironclad to be moored in the Thames as a boy's school. Everything, she would have argued, had Providence implanted the power of argumentation in her brain, has its use. The use of a pretty woman is—first, to marry well; secondly, to flirt well. Of course there should be as much discretion put into the second as the

first; but to do the one and to be forbidden to do the other, was as if you buttered your loaf and then could not cut your slice off. There is nothing pleasanter to an harmonious mind than a sense of completeness; and for a woman to only half fulfil her destiny is as disagreeable and annoying to a well-regulated person as a picture hung askew is to a correct eye.

"*Do* tell me all about it, dearest," she purred, holding a teacup in her gloved hand, after an interesting digression on the fashion for the coming season. "*Did* you run away with him? It must have been such fun! How I do wish——"

And Mrs. Belfort heaved a deep sigh, suggestive of thoughts too big or too burning for mere words.

Alice did not notice her friend's question, but apparently spoke her thoughts aloud when she said musingly:

"Things do seem hard—too hard almost to bear. It is difficult at my age to give up all thoughts of happiness."

"Fiddlestick!" cried Mrs. Belfort, almost energetically. "Give up! Time enough for that, my dear, when we are given up—I mean when we get old and ugly. So *monsieur le mari* is a bear, is he?"

"No, he is not a bear—at least not particularly."

"No, I don't suppose bears are jealous," said Mrs. Belfort, thinking of a recent surreptitious visit to the Zoological Gardens with Charlie Holster. "But, really, my dear Alice, you mustn't stand any nonsense. He'll be going on with some one else soon, if you don't take care."

"He! Who?"

"Why, Windy, to be sure. They say he has been making up to Mrs. Surtees at Melton this winter, but I don't quite believe it."

"You mustn't think it would matter to me if he did, Minna," said Alice, though a thump of her heart and a sudden tinge of colour on her cheeks belied her words.

"Well, after all, there are as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it, and a change is very nice, certainly. I

know I always get tired of a man after a year. Even Charlie Holster is——"

"You don't know me a bit!" cried Alice impetuously, "and I hate to hear you say such things, for you don't mean them," she added, looking affectionately at the pretty little doll opposite her.

"Perhaps I don't know you, dear. I know very few things, except that one can be very happy if one determines to be, and I suppose very miserable if one likes being miserable. I don't."

"But can't you see, Minna, that sometimes one is obliged to be miserable? Now, if Captain Holster——"

"Dear old Charlie!"

"If Captain Holster had to go to India or some other dreadful place——"

"Well, poor fellow, he's so impressionable, he'd be very happy with the—what is it they are called?—the grass widows."

"And you?"

"Me, dear! Oh, I—I should get someone else. How good-looking Lord Badsworth is!"

"Is he?" said Alice, absently.

"Is he? Do you mean to say you don't know what he thinks of you?"

"No, dear, and I don't care. As to coming to see you often, of course I will, as often as I can. It isn't very pleasant here now."

"It's too bad of Mr. Chillingham," said Mrs. Belfort, rising, and surveying herself in the glass over the mantelpiece. "Dear, dear! how red this horrid east wind makes one's nose! It really is too bad of him! I wonder what he supposed when he married a pretty wife? But I must be off; mind you come to my music to-morrow; quite a small party."

"Yes—but—you know I can't meet Lord Windermere, Minna."

"You can't! Why not?"

"You must not ask him when I am coming."

"Very well," and Mrs. Belfort smiled knowingly. "I'll join with the husband, and the poor child shall be kept out of mischief. Good-bye."

Lady Glorme, too, whose hard defiant manner and coarseness of speech had before repelled Alice, now became a constant visitor in North Street. An intrigue was her favourite pastime, whether of her own or of others, and as Sir John was a pander by nature, she met with no opposition in her schemes concerning Alice and Windermere.

Alice's previous insensibility to her advances had, moreover, given her a slight reason for revenge, and she thought that if no more amusing occupation distracted her thoughts, it would be interesting enough to bring this little affair to a *dénouement*, and then turn on her friend, and let her see whether innocence would fare better than brazenness when the world's tongue was wagging.

The Brocklesbys remained in the country, and it happened that few of Alice's intimate friends had yet come to town, so that, in her wish to escape as much as possible from the house where everything reminded her of the lover whose memory she worshipped, and the husband whose faith she had betrayed, she divided a good deal of her time between the two residences inhabited by Mrs. Belfort and Lady Glorme.

And Alice's nature, rendered weaker by her unlucky love or fancy, or whatever it might have been, was more ready now than before to receive the insidious lessons continually instilled into her. Her code of morals received shock after shock; human nature seemed to be so different, so much worse, so much more easy-going than she had imagined it. At last her own sin, which loomed a few weeks before a giant of atrocity, appeared nothing compared to actions she heard daily spoken of with jest, with envy, with approbation.

Rigid virtue did seem so ridiculous when criticised by those to whom, in all sincerity, virtue could only be hypo-

crisy. Had Jack possessed an iota of worldliness, a very little knowledge of the society into which he had plunged his pretty wife, there would have been time even yet to have stepped in and saved her. But, crushed by the weight of his hopeless love, he only stood aside and awaited the end with despair. They seldom met now, except at dinner; and by tacit consent it had been arranged that the oftener Alice could find a dinner at a friend's house, and Jack could therefore dine at his club, the more agreeable it was for both.

There were times, however, when Jack revolted against this arrangement, and would stay in all day, or accompany Alice in her shopping expeditions, or walk with her in the park; but the experiment was never successful, and both were intensely relieved when the end of such long silent days came, and with it bed and oblivion of care.

There were times, too, when Jack, with heated words, demanded an explanation of their misery, as if by additional probing he could cure the gaping wound. And then there was probably a furious quarrel, during which both said things they afterwards regretted, but which rankled in the hearts of the hearers. It is so easy, so natural, and comfortable, to forget the evil things you have said; but it is almost impossible to forget the injuries said to yourself.

At his club Jack now assumed a new character. Silent and shy before, he now talked louder than any in the smoking-room; his modest pint at dinner was changed for a bottle: and his one glass upstairs to moisten his tobacco into an indefinite number. Whenever a bit of gambling was going forward, he threw himself into the thick of it, with varying luck, and soon acquired a certain name for coolness in either fortune, and for the amount of strong waters he could place under his belt without showing signs of it.

He became far more popular, and popularity had always been incense to him; but now its charm was gone. Ever

present with him, whether holding safe the odd trick when the stakes were "ponies" and "fifties," or congratulating the *debutante* behind the scenes after a successful first night, was the recollection of the homeless home, where the woman he loved so passionately beat herself against the bars and cried out against her cagement. One night, after a protracted bout of *écarté*, during which Sir John Glorme had without much difficulty extracted from him a sum representing about three years of his income, Jack returned home in the morning light, and the fresh air found out the cleft in his armour, and forced him to walk in a manner suitable enough in a sailor, but not creditable to a gentleman in evening dress.

Alice, detained in the drawing-room by the charms of some new novel, had gone to sleep in her chair, and there he found her. Steadying himself with difficulty he leant over her, and passionately pressed his lips to hers. It was months since he had thus kissed her, and in the confused state of his brain he imagined that he had obtained a triumph, and smiled foolishly as she woke.

"What—who is it? Jack!"

"Yes, dear," and trying to combine dignity with sentiment he looked, as indeed we are sadly obliged to own he was, rather dissipated and more than a little intoxicated.

Alice rose indignantly, and, when he attempted to stop her passage to the door, pushed him easily aside, and swept out of the room.

He had tried to speak again, but a horrifying consciousness of his own condition caused the words to die upon his lips, while the look of contemptuous aversion he saw upon her face almost sobered him. His thoughts refused to arrange themselves in his poor fuddled brain, but he felt that the last link that had bound her to him was now broken—that the respect she could not before help feeling for him was gone for ever.

CHAPTER XXXV.

To be wroth with one we love
Doth work like madness on the brain.

Christabel.

And I have thought that peace of mind
Should not be for a smile resigned ;
And I've repelled the tender lure,
And hoped my heart should sleep secure.

Moore's *Anacreon.*

Badsworth's feelings when, soon after the flight to Nice, he had obeyed his friend's instructions and delivered to Lord Windermere a sum of money representing as nearly as possible what that nobleman had lent to Jack or paid for Alice, had not been agreeable. He had been grievously shocked and hurt by the whole business ; for, while Jack was a dear friend, Alice had seemed to him the living embodiment of all that was perfect and most innocent in womanhood.

Many a quarrel he had risked at clubs by his savage interposition when her name was lightly spoken ; and, indeed, had he happened to live in those dreadful days when a man, bored and *blasé*, could not comfortably sneer away a woman's character without having perhaps to answer for his words at the sword's point, he might have found plenty of enjoyment for his rapier. The many half-unconscious snubs Alice had inflicted on the professional lady-killers raised her a good many keen enemies among them, and when she came down from her pedestal and behaved as they had predicted in their wrath, it was impossible that the triumph should be entirely stifled, and many a side-splitting joke and neat riddle testified to their skill in making scandal amusing, and an agreeable

set-off to more important converse upon horse-racing or polo. Badsworth's own feelings towards Alice he studiously refrained from analysing. All he knew was that in the hour of her downfall if such must come and he knew of the wretched state of affairs in North Street—he could not do otherwise than feel for her that pity which is nearly akin to love. And Alice read the pity in his kind eyes when they met, and nursed an utter reasonless grudge against him for it. She knew him loyal and true, and perhaps felt that this loyalty and truth made her conduct a shade worse—that it added another pang to the sorrow and shame she could not help feeling in her saner moments.

She met Windermere sometimes now in society, but their greeting was of the most formal kind, only once or twice when accidentally she met his artistically melancholy, sentimentally wistful gaze fixed upon her, the light words upon her lips died away, and she felt as if she were choking with suppressed emotion. Perhaps her beauty and charm of manner caused more sensation this season than it had the last. Great personages had smiled on her now, and the titled toadies hastened to supply to their leaders that flattery which takes the form of imitation. There was now also a certain melancholy in her air which many thought suited her better than her former childlike gaiety, and when soft words fell from the exquisite mouth, while the lustrous eyes gazed dreamily into vacancy, many a man whose creed was generally that of cynical worldliness felt that it would indeed be worth while to give

> All other bliss
> And all his worldly worth for this,
> To waste his whole heart in one kiss
> Upon those perfect lips.

But she did not flirt, in the ordinary sense of the word. There was a natural caress in her tone, a gentle sweet-

ness in her voice, which she could not have suppressed had she attempted it; and the wretchedness of her heart made her grateful to all around her for what she deemed their kindness.

That all the world should love her was very comforting, and like a child she clung the more to kindness when she felt she scarcely deserved it.

Any ideas Windermere may have formed as to seeking fresh conquests vanished at the sight of her success in society; and had he expressed his thoughts aloud he would have said he was just now riding a waiting race.

He was not ignorant of the secret of her altered manner, and knew well the meaning of the unwilling looks she often cast in his direction. He understood, too, or thought he understood why her words were so cold when she addressed him, and why she took such pains to avoid a *tête-à-tête;* and he bided his time patiently and confidently, congratulating himself on the fact of there being yet many weeks to elapse before the end of the season. Perhaps, had he known the fierceness of the struggle in the poor child's heart, even he would have relented; but he scarcely believed in the existence of deeper feelings than his own, and considered that the love which novelists sometimes portrayed as divorced from any grosser feeling was only a pretty invention of those novelists, and had no place whatever in real life. Like many another woman, Alice had set up a worthless idol for her worship, but it must be allowed that in this case the idol was excessively good-looking, very popular, most agreeable, and rode, danced, sang, and made love like the Admirable Crichton himself.

She was not the first of her sex who had deemed him worthy of a great sacrifice; but unfortunately she had not acquired the art of spreading her passion thin over many such affairs—as the butter in our schoolroom days was spread over the loaf—and dashed down the whole pat at once, to eat dry bread for the remainder of her life.

As the season went on Jack went less and less into society, and spent more and more time at his club. The Duke of Cheshire had given Alice a horse, and it was his delight to accompany her every morning in Rotten Row; pleased, as all elderly men are, to be seen with an acknowledged beauty. Her talk amused him excessively, and with him she was more at her ease than with others; and sometimes, listening to his half-hearted but amusing cynicism, almost forgot her troubles. He knew perfectly well that all was not right between the young couple, and had a vague idea that he might do good by seeing more of them; so that the frugal luncheon or dinner in North Street was often honoured by his pleasant presence and old-world courtliness.

Lady Brocklesby, seeing which way the wind blew, trimmed her sails accordingly, refused to be offended by the many excuses Alice invented to escape the dreary meal in Eaton Square, and was most effusive in her admiration of and affection for her daughter-in-law. His lordship—who was busy inventing a matchless torpedo—was only too pleased that things should go smoothly again, and gave, in strict confidence, so many different versions to his cronies of the Nice journey, that they all were effectually puzzled, and only agreed upon one point, that "poor Brocklesby was breaking up—head going—no memory—always thought him a little *odd*," and so dismissed the subject.

Spencer Chillingham, having suddenly adopted the tenets of the Free-Love Brotherhood, and gone to America to look more closely into them, was not likely to be an advocate of family severity; and as to Jane, she did not think it necessary to judge for herself in such matters and was only too delighted to be taken out by her sister-in-law, and to bask in some of the reflected rays of her popularity. Emily alone stood out. It was all very well to hush-up the scandal of the elopement, but until she heard a proper and verified explanation, she would be-

lieve it did occur, and her brother's absurd weakness in condoning it could not alter her notions of right and wrong. The Reverend Theophilus was a little inclined to dispute his wife's ruling on this point; but, like a wise man, he thought it better to give way occasionally on small matters, so that the great ones might be more certainly decided in his favour, and did not seriously contest her determination. So, when Alice, as in duty bound, drove in her neat victoria to St. Banbury's rectory-house, "Not at home" was the invariable response—a circumstance which, we fear, troubled our pretty sinner not at all.

One morning Jack, contrary to his wont, had come on foot to the park—ostensibly to cast his eye over a new hack of which the Duke of Cheshire was proud—and as he walked moodily down the path by the carriages, scarcely noticing the salutes of his friends, a voice from a smart pony-carriage arrested his steps.

"Oh, Jack! Mr. Chillingham I mean. How are you? We haven't met for an age. I've just got an engagement at the——Theatre. Ain't you glad? Why, how seedy you're looking!"

"Am I? I can't say the same of you, Violet. You are blooming. Better looking than ever, I declare, if that's possible."

"Now, you know, sir, *you* are not allowed to pay me compliments. I thought that was our compact."

"You see the sudden surprise was too much for me. So you have got the great engagement at last. When do you open?"

"Oh, directly, I believe—and I'm to have real good parts. You must come the first night."

"Come! of course, I will; and bring all my friends."

"I say, Jack;" and Violet put her pretty face down close to his, "it's all right again, isn't it?"

She spoke in a low voice, and with much sympathy in her eyes.

Jack hesitated, and looked annoyed.

"All right again? Yes, of course it is."

"Oh! I'm so glad!" she cried, clasping her hands. "I was sure it would be so; that you were mistaken. I never was so pleased at anything in my life as when Charlie Holster told me so."

"Oh, he told you, did he?" said Jack, raging within at his affairs being talked over by such people.

"Yes; you must come and see me again as you used, and we will have some more pleasant chats. When? Why not now? Let me drive you home. My ponies are such ducks, and I'm quite a first-class whip—even Tom Bobsley says so. Oh no! Perhaps it wouldn't do for you to be seen in my trap!" And her laugh had a touch of bitterness in it.

They were at the end of the drive nearest to Apsley House, and were therefore close to the Row. As Jack was about to refuse Violet's invitation, rather surprised at her asking him so to defy the *convenances*, he happened to see Windermere, mounted on the most perfect thoroughbred that money could secure, and looking a very good specimen of a young Englishman, twist his horse suddenly round, and accost a lady who appeared to be riding alone.

That lady was Alice, the Duke of Cheshire having turned to the railing for a few moments to exchange some words with a friend on foot.

Jack fancied that he could even at that distance see the blush that mantled on her cheek when Windermere bent his head eagerly down to address her, and ground his teeth.

"Well, good-bye!" cried Violet, shortening her reins, and taking her ivory-handled whip from its socket. "I shall have a turn round the park."

"Take me with you," said Jack, and in a moment he was at her side. "Now drive as close to the end of the Row as the peeler will let you. I want to see if—that's it!"

"Who was that lady who looked at you so oddly?"

asked Violet, as they whirled along towards the Marble Arch.

"That? My wife!"

Violet looked round quickly. Something she saw in his face kept her unusually silent during the remainder of their drive.

"Believe me, I feel for you," Windermere had said to Alice in the few moments that elapsed before the Duke returned to her side. "It is cruel of him to humiliate you in public. My poor darling, will you never let yourself or me be happy?"

Then, with a grave bow, he rode off, feeling that the incident of that morning had brought him very near indeed to his triumph.

The ride that day in the park, the Duke was forced to own, was not a success. No efforts of his could dispel Alice's taciturnity, and at last when she begged to go home, on the plea of a headache, his grace was not sorry.

Furious with Jack, angry with herself, almost angry with Windermere for daring to speak as he had done, she returned home, and underwent veritable torture at luncheon listening to the empty and ill-natured gossip of Flittery, and trying to laugh at the somewhat foolish jokes of Johnny Beere.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

'Tis o'er! No more we face the odds
Against our hopes that fate has set;
And only ask, oh, cruel gods!
One moment when we may forget.

R. D. STORDALE.

"I SHAN'T see you any more this season, old fellow," said Badsworth to Jack one morning at his club; "for I'm off in the *Wraith* for a cruise, and a bit of racing, too, perhaps, if I can find anything slow enough to beat."

"Take me with you?" said Jack. "Who is coming?"

"Only Keyser. Of course I should be delighted. Nothing I should like better—only——"

"Of course if you don't want me," began Jack, offended at the other's hesitation.

"Don't be a fool, Jack. I was only thinking that perhaps—well, you see—do you think it would be wise to go away just now—to leave Mrs. Chillingham all alone? She would be dull——"

"Dull!" interrupted Jack, bitterly. "No, my absence won't make her dull. Heaven knows we are dull enough. No; put all that out of your head, and don't be inhospitable. I crave a berth on board the *Wraith;* and will the friend of my youth refuse me so slight a favour?" But there was a lack of humour in the bombast; Jack's jokes, never very comic, were utterly devoid of fun just at present.

"Very well," said Badsworth, but still reluctantly, knowing, as he did, the falseness of the line which tells us that "absence makes the heart grow fonder." "Very well, only you must look sharp, as I want to sail to-morrow in time for the Porthampton regatta. The *Wraith* is all ready, and we've nothing to do but to take down the

box from Fortnum and Mason's, and provide ourselves with some light reading and smoke. Mind you eschew nails in the heels of your boots; old Sharp, my skipper and tyrant, is very particular about his decks, and would order me overboard if he saw the imprints of my hoofs, I believe. By Jove! we'll have great fun. Keyser amuses me, though most people think him a bore, and he is really a good fellow at heart."

"Yes," said Jack, sighing, and watching the blue smoke of his cigarette curling upwards towards the ceiling, "we will have fun; we will forget all our bothers for a short time, at any rate; the gentle moralising of Keyser shall mingle its influence with the ripple of the waves against the good ship's side, and lull us to dreamless rest; while amid the battle of the elements we will—oh! hang it, I forget what people do amid the battle of the elements—I only know I feel inclined to lie down below on such occasions. And, thank Heaven, by a judicious silence as to our course, we need scarcely ever get a letter. How long shall the cruise be?"

"Oh, about a fortnight. We can do some of the regattas and end by a look at the Irish Coast. Well, you are on, eh? Meet me to-morrow morning at Waterloo at eleven o'clock."

"I'm going for a cruise with Badsworth," said Jack that evening to his wife.

"Are you?" she said, coldly, without looking up from her book. "I hope you will enjoy yourself."

"Thank you."

"Shall you be away long?"

"About a fortnight."

"Oh."

"Perhaps you'd like me to stay away longer; I daresay I could manage it."

She raised her eyes calmly. Since the episode in the park, when she thought Jack had so gone out of his way to insult her publicly, her manner had hardened considerably.

"Why should I wish you to stay away, or to go away? It's all the same to me."

"Yes, I suppose it is. I daresay if I were drowned or hanged to-morrow, it would be 'all the same' to you!"

"I hope you won't do anything foolish or rash, so as to run a risk of being drowned; and as to your being hanged—well, I suppose that is always in your own hands."

"You are very sarcastic this evening."

"Am I? I didn't mean to be. But perhaps it is a second case of the man who had been talking prose all his life and had never known it."

"I don't care twopence about the man who talked prose," said Jack, returning sulkily to his evening paper.

"I don't see why you should," replied his wife, turning over a page of her book. And this was their parting: for soon after, and without further conversation between them, Jack left the house and sauntered, cigar in mouth, to his club, where at least he could gain a temporary oblivion of his cares. This was their parting. Alice, amid her other qualities, was possessed of a strong natural pride, which she had often been cautioned, in her early youth, would assuredly bring her to a bad end. And the insult in the park she could not yet forgive. It seemed so much the worse because it occurred just when she was, as she thought, so bravely fighting the desperate battle against her own fondest wishes. That she should be stabbed by him whose honour she was at such a sacrifice defending! It was outrageous.

She dreamed of no revenge; it did not seem to her that, as Mrs. Bélfort insisted, this act of Jack's put him outside the pale; destroyed all the right he had to her loyalty; but it did seem that she had been cruelly insulted, and that she owed it to herself to resent it most haughtily. So it came about that they parted with cold, querulous words, and Jack went down next day to Southampton with his friends, and tried, his heart feeling like a stone in his bosom, to emulate their thoughtless gaiety.

The *Wraith* was a neat schooner of a little over a hundred tons, well built and well found and fitted, although not in that gaudy drawing-room style now so much in vogue. She looked like business all over; not too smart and ladylike for a turn at trawling, and not too slow to hold her own in a smart breeze against many of the racing machines. As, meeting a stiff nor'-easter off the Foreland, she sent the spray flying over her graceful bows and the bubbling sea hissing up to the lee rail, Jack for the time forgot his woes, and felt his spirits rise with that enthusiasm which we patriotically believe only Britons feel when they are struggling with wind and water.

The newnesss of the life, too, had a singular charm. Of course, the unscrewing of the swing table was forgotten, and great was the breaking of crockery in consequence. Of course, Keyser tipped his chair over backwards at dinner, in the midst of a mighty jobation as to the civilising effects of ozone. Of course, everyone bumped their heads and skinned their elbows in sudden and thoughtless movements, and, of course, each incident caused much laughter of the hearty kind seldom heard in Pall Mall.

And Jack, when, with much difficulty and rasping of shins, he had climbed into his narrow berth, said the little prayer which had somehow survived from his nursery days, and which he repeated half-shamefacedly on going to sleep each night, and the short addition of which he was the author (in which Alice's name and happiness and love came), with more confidence in his simple words being heard than he had felt since the day when he met Sir John Glorme outside Violet's house.

It would be untrue to say that Alice felt no pangs of conscience at the coldness with which she had parted from her husband. Notwitstanding his performance in Violet's pony-carriage, he had, she could but confess, been very good to her. She could readily understand what

he felt at her changed feelings, and she pitied him from her heart—pitied him as if she was not a free agent in the matter, and was almost equally to be pitied for being perforce the cause of unhappiness to one she esteemed. If Windermere, with his undefinable charm, had never existed, had never bewitched her with his glances and whispers! But it was too late. She could only be miserable, and make those who loved her miserable; and in the meantime there was, there could possibly be, no harm in her extracting as much amusement and forgetfulness out of society as possible, and if the exigencies thereof required that she should occasionally exchange a few formal words with the man ever present in her thoughts—well, it behoved her to meet this temptation boldly, since it was unavoidable, and to beat down the cravings of her weak heart. She nursed some resentment against Jack for going away just now; for in some degree she felt his presence in North Street a protection.

Mrs. Belfort looked upon the yachting tour as a direct interposition of Providence in favour of nature and the laws of modern society, and was most ingeniously indignant with her friend for refusing such assistance.

"Opportunities," said she, reflectively, "are not always to be had for the asking. It is a curious thing that, although there are twelve—at least, I suppose there are twenty-four, aren't there, dear?—hours in a day, there are so few opportunities. Charlie—my old man, you know—has really got quite fussy lately, and I know he means to bother more than usual over my bills, even though I manage to keep back half of them. And he utterly refuses to take me to Cowes this year, though I've got the most lovely yachting frocks, and a bathing-dress—ah, something like! I'll show it you when you come next to our place. I must get to Trouville somehow. If Charlie won't take me I'll run away from him—that I will!"

Minna Belfort looked the image of serene and childlike

innocence and prettiness as she gave vent to this terrific threat, which, however, she was quite capable of putting into execution; so, to avert any fears on the part of our most respectable readers, we may mention, that by giving up Cowes, she did prevail upon Mr. Belfort to go to Trouville, and managed to excite much attention there, both by yachting frocks and bathing costume.

Her calm, babyish recklessness created much havoc among the French dandies, and inspired them with a respect for the English style of flirtation which they had never before felt.

M. de la Pollisonnière indeed declared that she was well worthy of his homage; which he would no doubt have laid at her pretty feet had he not at that moment unfortunately been engaged in attracting the matrimonial attention of an American heiress, whose dollars would, he thought, be most useful to Mademoiselle Fanchette of the ——— Theatre, Paris, lately become rather too greedy for the Marquis's somewhat attenuated purse.

This stern devotion to duty in preference to pleasure gained the poor gentleman much pity and admiration from Alphonse and Victor and all his friends of the *cercle* at Trouville; and it was written home to astonished youths still lingering in the French capital that De la Pollisonnière was going, at last, to "range himself."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

The ring of silver voices, and the sheen
Of festal garments—and my lady streams
With her gay court across the garden green,
Some laugh and dance, some whisper their love dreams.

FREDERICK TENNYSON.

I pray thee, by the gods above,
Give me the mighty bowl I love,
And let me sing in wild delight,
"I will—I will be mad to-night!"

MOORE.

WITH all their faults, the bitterest enemies of Sir John and Lady Glorme could not deny that on all occasions when they extended hospitality to their friends, the thing was done with no niggard hand. The best dry champagne flowed as if it were but five shillings a bottle, and Gunter's supply was drawn upon with a recklessness which seemed stupendous to the lucky guest.

The pair might be under a cloud, but at any rate its lining was well silvered and gilt, and with your mouth full of *pâté de foie gras*, washed down with Chateau Margaux of '48, you could scarcely be expected to take pains about finding the dark side of the cloud.

Perhaps the villa near Maidenhead was, next to his figure and *air*, the thing of which the Baronet was most proud, and it certainly was a pretty little place, with its rose-clad walls, cunningly-devised nooks and corners, which Sir John called, with one of his coarse laughs, "flirting-traps;" with its smooth lawn, broken here and there by brilliant flower-beds and flowering shrubs, sloping down to the river; with its neat stables, its miniature farm, its exquisite piggeries, built like so many dolls' Swiss cottages; its billiard-room, its ball marquee at the

back, its shady polo-ground, and its general air of wealth and good taste.

A great many good people, after one visit to Rose Villa, declared they would never go there more. But they generally did return when asked; and, when there, fell into the prevailing habit of whispering in gloomy corners, and looking as viciously mysterious as possible.

When Alice received an invitation to one of the Rose Villa parties her first impulse was to refuse. She had seen a good deal of Lady Glorme of late, and had found that lady's utter contempt for goodness and habit of classifying the world as hypocrites or knaves act like a tonic on her—disagreeable, but strengthening. Still, from knowing Lady Glorme to becoming one of her *set* was a long step, and Alice shrank from doing what, nevertheless, she knew so many young married women who enjoyed the esteem of society had done, and going to this Maidenhead villa without her lord and master.

Some instinct, too, told her that Lady Glorme had a reason for trying to bring her and Windermere together again; and she mistrusted herself if she were tried too hard, or too high, as the racing slang of the day would have it.

Had it not been for a joint attack made by Lady Glorme and Mrs. Belfort she would have refused point-blank; and even then she only consented provisionally. Her visitors, however, were well aware of the truth that the woman who hesitates is lost, and Lady Glorme had but little fear of her party being without the graceful presence of the beauty of the day.

Never, perhaps, had party gone off better than this one. Johnny Beere outdid himself in eccentricities; Charlie Holster went through the most complicated aquatic feats; Flittery was swamped in a canoe amid loud merriment, and crawled dripping on shore with a terrible grin upon his wet face—for he saw a duchess laughing. The comic singer from the racecourse surpassed

himself in *impromptu* personalities; but failed, here in such good society, to raise the blushes he could command when performing before less elevated folk, and inwardly cursed the want of indelicacy of his muse. The sun was bright, and no fear of damage prevented the ladies from wearing their gaudiest plumage; while the young gentlemen in their white hats, trousers, and coats resembled so many aristocratic bakers.

Alice was there—looking very young and pretty—and enjoyed herself excessively until she saw Windermere scull down the river in an outrigger and proceed leisurely to disembark at the villa landing place. Why did he look so handsome in his careless boating dress? And why did he come there? Were there no other parties in or about all London, that they must always meet? As she angrily mused in this fashion, her eyes met his, and she blushed as she tried to answer his bow with proper carelessness. To hide her embarrassment of course she talked more, and appeared indeed to flirt more, than usual; and young Mohawk, of the Life Guards Green, with difficulty controlled his emotion as he thought he had at last, after years of trying, achieved a veritable triumph.

"Will you give me that rose?" he said, wondering why her voice would be so husky when he most wanted a melodious note.

"This? Oh yes!" and Alice smiled as she met the eager gaze of his somewhat expressionless orbs.

"Thanks—so much. By Jove, Mrs. Chillingham, you're a——"

"Good judge of roses—and who to give them to."

"No—I was going to say that you are the——"

"Look, Captain Mohawk—there are Mr. Beere and Captain Leedle going to run a race in sacks. What fun! I wish you'd run in a sack too."

"I will," cried poor Mohawk, desperately. "I will if you wish it. But, oh, Mrs. Chillingham, may I call you——"

"Oh, do look!—that's capital—poor Mr. Beere—son e-

one ought to pick him up. Now you may go on, Captain Mohawk—you were telling me all about your bear-fight after mess; let me see, you'd got to where all the chairs had been thrown out of the window, and Lord Softy was setting fire to the curtains."

"I don't care to talk to *you* about such things," said Mohawk, with indescribable tenderness. "I'm sure you don't care to hear them. Don't you think one can feel serious sometimes?"

"Yes—I should say poor Mr. Beere does at this moment—poor fellow, his nose is bleeding. By-the-bye, have you ever seen Goggles, Captain Mohawk? No! Then you must come to North Street and make his acquaintance. He's sure to bite you—he's so jealous—he always bites my particular friends."

It was lucky for Captain Mohawk's self-esteem that he did not see the indifferent sarcasm in Alice's eyes as she said this.

"I should like it of all things—but I don't think I should come to see Goggles."

"Shouldn't you? He's well worth it."

Alice was getting a little tired of her military admirer, and looked round for someone to relieve guard. As she did so Windermere happened to saunter past with Mrs. Surtees on his arm—Mrs. Surtees, whose name had been coupled with his during the winter—the best-looking of hard-riding women, and not inexperienced in the chase of other animals than foxes.

After this Captain Mohawk found his flirtation terribly uphill work; indeed, he soon made an excuse, and betook himself to the house for sympathy and champagne-cup, declaring to Jim Summerton, who was likewise strengthening himself for renewed attacks upon his natural enemy—woman—that after all little Alice Chillingham had devilish little in her; whereupon the Honourable Jim winked, and looked so unutterably arch, that his friend respected him from that hour.

When Windermere took Mrs. Surtees for a stroll and disappeared from view, a great change came over our heroine. This was an unlooked-for solution of all difficulties. The way along which she could flee from temptation was cleared for her. And yet it was scarcely pleasure that agitated her. Jack, could he have read her thoughts, would have found there ample revenge for what he had suffered from the pangs of jealousy.

It seemed that the hour when the party were to collect for dinner would never come; and when it did come, and she found herself seated between her host and Captain Mohawk, whose attentions to her, Lady Glorme had, of course, observed, brought no comfort; for opposite to her, so that she could scarcely tear her eyes from the contemplation of them, were Lord Windermere and the terrible huntress.

It was hard to bear with equanimity. To renounce is all very well, and carries with it the sweetness of virtue and of martyrdom. But to be renounced! That is far different, for it neither receives nor merits anything but contempt.

Alice was not accustomed to employ much art in concealing her emotions, and her host beside her, and Lady Glorme at the other side of the table, read her like a book; while Captain Mohawk wished he was anywhere but beside this silent, rather alarming young woman.

Mrs. Surtees had a dim suspicion that she was being made use of for some purpose; but plots were things to be expected at Rose Villa, and all was fish that came to her net. A few hours' flirtation with Windermere was in itself an agreeable thing; and if he meant nothing, why, she meant nothing either, so they were quits on that score. Besides, although rather a queen at Melton, she was scarcely at her ease in London, and was not sorry to show these fine ladies who could not ride a young horse over a gate to save their lives, that she, Kate Surtees, could do something besides ride a young horse over a gate, and do it as well as they.

Everything must have an end—at least, so people say—and at last Alice's torture ceased, and they broke up into small groups on the lawn, the men lighting cigars, some of the ladies—we are sorry to record—placing cigarettes between their delicate lips, and some betaking themselves to the river and drifting about lazily under the bright moon. A subdued laugh or an occasional burst of song that came across the water sounded prettily in the still night, and even men of the Mohawk stamp felt the influence of the scene. It was an hour when Diogenes himself would have made love, had he but a couple of bottles of Sir John's dry *Monopole* under his belt, lit one of that worthy's half-crown cigars, and sate himself down under the bright stars with a pair of soft, shining eyes and pouting lips within three feet of his philosophership.

"Will you come out in a boat with me?"

It was Windermere who spoke, and his voice was sweet music to Alice's ears. But she tried to be stern.

"No, thanks; I shall do very well here."

"Oh! Ah, yes! here's Mohawk coming this way. I won't interrupt."

"Oh no, no!" she cried, in almost comic despair. "Anything but that. Do save me from him!"

"I see you *are* saved. He cannot pass Kate Surtees's chair."

"Had you not better hurry back in time, then?"

"Hurry back! Poor Kate! No, I think we're about tired of each other by this time. I like horsey talk very well in winter, but it is desecration to drag it into a scene like this."

"I thought you—you liked her?"

"So I do. She's a fine rider; better than many men who think they can go, but she's out of place anywhere but on a horse."

"You did not think so all this afternoon?"

"'*Quand on n'a pas ce qu'on aime*,' you know. I could say now, with that very industrious gentleman deceased, 'I have wasted a day.'"

His words were careless; but his tone belied them, and he threw himself down on the grass at Alice's feet.

They neither of them spoke. He was no novice in these matters, and knew well the inestimable value of judicious pauses when hearts are full. At last he said, throwing away his cigar, which fell with a splash into the river, and made a bubbling circle of light—

"I wish life could be always this."

"What—dining with the Glormes?" Alice's voice would tremble, despite herself.

"No, sitting here, near to you. Oh, Alice, you do not know——"

"Oh, here's Windermere!" cried Beere, who did not reckon tact amid his virtues, coming up to them. "We want to have a charade in the ball-room. Lady Glorme's got a whole heap of properties. I've engaged myself as low comedian, and we want you to play the lover."

"I never make a fool of myself," said Windermere, rising. "Come out in a punt, Mrs. Chillingham. I'll promise not to upset you."

And as Windermere's strong arm with one stroke sent the punt out well into mid-stream, Johnny Beere shook his head with all the wisdom induced by a good dinner.

"Poor little thing! It's a d——d shame; but, after all, it's no business of mine."

The charade was a great success, particularly when Captain Mohawk appeared as suitor for the fair hand of Mrs. Surtees and failed to find any words in which to express his devotion; Johnny Beere, as a fine lady, was perfect; and Flittery's rendering of a sentimental ditty was deservedly encored.

But perhaps the great success of the whole day was the choice piece of scandal the whole party carried up to town with them in the last train, in consequence of the non-appearance of Lord Windermere and Mrs. Chillingham.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

Go where we will, this hand is thine,
Those eyes before me smiling thus,
Through good and ill, through storm and shine,
The world's a world of love for us!
On some calm, blessed shore we'll dwell,
Where 'tis no crime to love too well.

Lalla Rookh.

The punt had scarcely got way on her before Alice repented that she had so weakly yielded to Windermere's half-imperious invitation. And yet knowing, as of course she did, her own strength, there was nothing that the most censorious could carp at in the fact that they were spending a quiet after-dinner hour on the river, as is done by so many against whom no one would dare wag tongue.

It was, however, of no use to argue against the conviction which forced itself upon her, that this aquatic expedition was a crisis in her fate—that she had in this one weak moment knocked down the wall she had been so laboriously building between herself and the danger she longed for and feared so much.

Even Windermere, whose boast was that no woman had ever for a moment made him forget himself, felt to some extent the influence of the hour; and as he dropped his punt pole, and sitting down opposite to his passenger allowed the boat to drift with the stream, it really seemed, he afterwards declared, as if he might possibly be tempted to make a fool of himself.

"At last," he said.

Alice tried to answer, but no word would come. She was saying "At last" too in her heart, poor child!

And then began the sort of jerky, apparently meaningless talk which is so impossible to render on paper. Every

syllable of it has its own peculiar value to those engaged —in every silence there is a volume, in every broken-off sentence a whole world of meaning; but it is dull enough to outsiders in all conscience. Windermere saw that his best chance lay in persuading Alice that, although coldness and avoidance were very proper and correct in the ordinary run of these cases, theirs was no common instance of unhappy love; that although, of course, the world might applaud her for breaking his heart and rendering the rest of his life worthless and miserable, it was a selfish, nay, almost an immoral kind of morality after all—for which she of course would take her orthodox reward both in this world and in the next, and could therefore afford to sit comfortably still, and watch his struggles and wretchedness with all decorous equanimity. That is, if she could—if she was so cold, so calculating, so cruel. If she meant thus to beggar him to the end of time of all the wealth of love in him which he put under her foot—well, perhaps it was correct. No doubt any one of the bench of bishops would say so, and she could afford to sneer at the ravings of a poor fool who could only love and place his love above *les convenances.* She had had a victory—no other woman, whatever people might say, had ever touched the chord in him which we all have in us, if we only knew it—and of course she was in her right to triumph. But oh, would she not for one brief moment, now that circumstances had made it possible that they should meet face to face once more, despite all her cruel avoidance of him, would she not look kindly at him—say one word (it would not be compromising, she need not be afraid of Mrs. Grundy there) to cheer him, and make it possible for him to go on fighting against the hard world, although all happiness was lost to him for ever?

Windermere said all this and much more to the same effect, far better than we can write it; and he was aided, also, by a pair of uncommonly eloquent eyes, and a voice which he well knew how to make the most of.

"And when does *he* come back?" asked he, after one of those long silences which say of much.

"I am not quite sure—but soon, certainly."

She sighed. The allusion to Jack came disagreeably in upon her reverie, and forced some unpleasant sanity into her sweet madness.

"And then, I suppose, we shall never see each other again?"

"Oh yes—often—at places, and——"

"No, I mean *alone*."

Alice said nothing. He was only putting her thoughts into words; and instinctively she felt that all her strength would now be needed.

"We must see each other sometimes—we *must*."

"I am afraid that I—that is, that he——"

"Alice, it is absurd for you to deny that we cannot live without meeting. It is too late now for scruples—is it not?"

Not the most sharp-eared could have heard whether the word that Alice's lips formed was "Yes" or "No." Perhaps she scarcely knew herself.

Whenever the stage of preconcerted arrangements for deceiving a husband is reached, all pity, all excuse must be swept away. And yet Alice—as we have striven to show—was not naturally bad.

There was much in her that was noble, that was self-sacrificing, that was true. Yet here was her nobility being dragged in the mud at the chariot-wheels of a worthless profligate, her self-sacrifice twisted into a selfish act of cruelty to one whose misfortune was that he loved her and had given her his all, her truth become nothing but organised deceit and petty lying. And yet, O reader, if any prim critic should tell you it is unnatural, that we are not describing human beings and human events and failings as they are, do not believe him; but look into the world of men and women going and coming around you, and tell that prim critic that he should buy a pair of spec-

tacles. It would be so easy, so pleasant to draw the good girl who does right always, and continually lets fall pretty sentiments and does charitable actions, and makes up flannel petticoats for the poor while the worldlings dance up at the Marquis's castle, and who of course marries the Marquis's eldest son, after three weeks' nursing of that young gentleman when he breaks his leg out hunting at her door, and she has brought him to a sense of his soul's danger during that period. Then, on the other hand, there could be nothing more sternly agreeable than to portray the wicked girl who is fond of diamonds and gowns, and never makes up flannel petticoats, and does make up to young men, and insists on going to the Castle while her little brother is dying; whom the Marquis's eldest son, after a brief flirtation, finds out and drops ignominiously, and who eventually gets killed in a railway accident, or catches the smallpox, and is hideous ever after. There would be little trouble in writing social history after this fashion, and it would no doubt give pleasure to many respectable admirers of "the eternal fitness of things." The only argument to be urged against this course is that, by some misconception possibly, human beings are not so easily *labellable*. They insist on having queer twists, and odd, unsuspected quirks, which are most annoying to all spectators with regular and well-balanced minds.

* * * * * * * * *

Had anyone with an ear for music been on the Thames bank near Maidenhead that night he would have been gratified by a song which came from a punt floating down the stream, sung by a melodious tenor voice to an air which, if not original, was pleasing enough.

Thus it went—

The summer moon is shining, love,
To bless but you and me;

And as we thus reclining, love,
A myriad visions see
Of love for aye—oh, gently say
That you are mine!

Our hearts may float for ever, love,
Upon the stream of night:
No rocks nor shoals shall sever, love,
The silent troth they plight,
If only you to love prove true,
For you are mine!

Then with the light of even, love,
Blessed light from dreamy eyes,
That hold another heaven, love,
In their unspoke replies;
And let me know, 'mid weal or woe,
That you are mine!

Poor Jack! He had never written a verse in his life, and had no more voice than a peacock.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Windermere, as they landed at the villa, "no one here. They can't have gone. Why! look here, Alice? This is a pleasant fix! The last train has gone." She clasped her hands in absolute despair. "We must get a special," said Windermere, and they hurried to the station. But of course, at that hour, a special was out of the question.

Alice felt that she had been caught in a trap, and was indignant. Get back to London somehow that night she declared she would, even if she walked the whole way. What Lady Glorme and her party must have said of her, what "all London" would say of her to-morrow, was appalling; and when at last they obtained a rickety fly and a pair of horses, most of the romance of the evening had fled, and for twenty weary miles Alice had the pleasure of contemplating what appeared to be something very like ruin.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

Oh, 'tis most sweet
When in one line two crafts directly meet.

Hamlet.

"GIVE her a little more sheet—steady so. Stand by, somebody, to sing out directly he sees the flash of the gun—it'll come a few seconds afore the sound. Look alive with that tackle there! How many minutes yet, sir?"

"Two and a half," said Jack, who, watch in hand, was intently regarding the beach in front of the Porthampton Yacht Club, where was stationed the gun by which they were to start.

It was what is called a "flying start," in which one gun is fired for preparation, and five minutes afterwards another, when the vessels have to cross an imaginary line between two objects. Nothing requires more skill, for, though it may be fatal to the yacht's chance to lose even half a minute by being late over the line, a fraction of a second too soon, and you have to turn back and recross, thus losing much time.

"One minute more!" sang out Jack, and the graceful little ships, crowded with snow-white canvas, neared each other and attempted a little jockeying to gain the coveted position of No. 1.

"Half a minute only!"

The *Corinne's* boom is well over the *Wraith's* taffrail, while the latter is putting her nose perilously near the rigging of the *Vol-au-Vent.*

"Time!"

There was a white puff of smoke, and before the sound came, three of them were past the mark-boat, their skip-

pers vying with each other in their frenzy and the loudness of their words of command. Captain Sharpe of the *Wraith* looked on with grim approval, as Jack lent a strong hand in the various rope-pullings to be gone through before all was considered to be as it should be for the long turn to windward they began with; even Keyser roused himself from his ordinary state of rumination, and forgetting all about cause and effect, tore the skin off his hands with reckless indifference, and would even have gone aloft had it been required of him. The only fixed ideas he possessed on the subject of yachting were that you must wear white shoes, carry a large pair of opera-glasses slung around a blue serge jacket, crown yourself with a police-inspector's cap, and stay on that portion of the deck which was uppermost, if possible without holding on to anything. Having also some misty idea on the subject of the immense advantage of shifting ballast, he gave himself a good deal of occupation, when it came to beating in short tacks, by going down to the cabin each time they went about, and carefully removing three books, which constituted their library, two umbrellas, an ink-bottle, and a packet of pens, from one side to the other.

His friends, imagining that he looked paler than his wont, attributed these constant disappearances down the companion to a wrong cause, which was very hard on poor Mr. Keyser, as he boasted himself to be an excellent sailor.

The *Wraith* sailed well; there was just enough wind to render the carrying of topsails before long of doubtful benefit, and soon she had managed, by dint of not loading herself, as the others were doing, with more than they could carry, to establish a clear lead of the whole fleet. As the wind continued to freshen, and canvass began to disappear, those on board her became more and more jubilant.

"By Jove!" said Badsworth, "if this goes on we shall

do it. Fancy the despised little *Wraith* showing her heels to the clippers! Look at the way they are burying themselves, and here we are on a level keel. Why, we could play billiards on the deck—eh, Keyser?"

Keyser, who had just emerged from below, nodded mysteriously.

"There goes the *Fiona's* topmast! Hurrah!" cried Jack exulting in a true philosophic spirit over his friend's misfortunes.

"There's no cause to be glad," grumbled the skipper, glancing round. "She'd have to take it in directly. Can you make out the mark-boat yet, Mr. Keyser?"

Keyser, who deemed it right at intervals to sweep the horizon with his glass, took a long survey of the dancing water, but failed to find what was wanted.

"*I* see it," said the captain, with sarcastic emphasis. "*I* see it half-an-hour ago just on the starboard bow."

Keyser gazed steadily over the port-side, and Captain Sharpe chuckled.

That sound was of good omen, for he had never been seen to smile until he thought he had his race pretty well in hand.

Yacht-racing is one of those amusements which afford no gratification to any except those actually engaged in them. There is nothing much more uninteresting than to see a crowd of vessels sail past a flag-boat at long intervals, and to hear that the one which passed last is the winner by time; still less amusing is it to read an account of such doings. So we will spare our readers any more of the chances and changes of the race in which the *Wraith* was engaged; until on rounding the last mark, she found herself a good mile ahead of anything, with a straight run in home dead before what had now increased to half a gale.

There were only about five miles to be traversed, and small fear of her being caught in that distance.

The enthusiasm of his companions had communicated

itself to Jack Chillingham; and Alice and Windermere, and all his minor woes, were forgotten in his longing for the victory of the *Wraith*.

A good luncheon, at which they were electrified by the discovery of Keyser's genius concerning the ballast, followed by that sweetest of soothers, the fragrant pipe, disposed him to look at everything through rose-coloured spectacles, and to forget the world was anything but luncheons, and pipes, and yacht races.

"This is the best fun I've ever had," he said to Badsworth, as they enjoyed the liberty they could now indulge in harmlessly of standing up on deck (for they were before the wind), and calmly and proudly surveyed the vainly-pursuing yachts.

"I shall always ask myself on board the *Wraith* when she is in commission, old chap."

"You shall," said Badsworth, warmly. "She shall never win a race without you to help. Hollo! what's that beastly steamer doing, Sharpe?"

"That's Lord Coddleboys', the *Blunderbore*. She'll give way for us right enough."

"Well, she's running it rather fine, anyhow. Confound it, Sharpe, she'll be into us!"

They all ran instinctively forwards, as a large screw-steam yacht came dashing at them at the rate of ten knots, they themselves going about fourteen.

"Put your helm down!" shouted Sharpe. "Put your helm down; get in that spinnaker: look alive; she's into us!"

The crash was terrific. The steamer's sharp bow cut half through the *Wraith's* side, and her floating was only a question of minutes. What had happened on board the *Blunderbore* no one ever quite knew. The ladies she carried had wanted to pass as close as possible to the winning yacht, which altered her course a little with a shift of wind as they neared her, and at the last moment the steamer did not answer her helm.

Jack was standing close to where she struck the *Wraith*,

and when, after the first crash, those on board had a moment to look round and realize their position, he was lying on the deck motionless, in the midst of an entangled heap of smashed bulwarks, blocks, rigging, and spars.

There was no time to lose, and they had scarcely lifted him up the side of the *Blunderbore* before the *Wraith* began to settle down.

The steamer backed out, to avoid danger from the tottering mast, and in ten minutes Badsworth's pretty ship had disappeared under the waves.

Of course, for they were close to the harbour, they were surrounded by a crowd of ships and boats of every description, and one very smart tourist in a pleasure-boat, whose nose betrayed his origin, was enterprising enough to offer Badsworth a small sum of money for his submerged ship, while a sharp-looking individual with a note-book forced himself up the side of the *Blunderbore* and took down a detailed account of the accident, for a local newspaper, from Keyser, whose nautical knowledge was used to such effect that the readers of that local newspaper were next day informed that the *Wraith* backed into the *Blunderbore's* quarter in consequence of the latter's having shifted her balloon jib and set her standing rigging.

Lord Coddleboys was most profuse in his apologies, although he would not quite admit his vessel to have been in the wrong; for Lord Coddleboys nursed a private idea that when he careered over the waters in his expensive vessel, with the Commodore's burgee at the main, and a beautiful new ensign flying astern, it was little short of impertinence for any other ship to get into his way; and the idea that he could be in any way bound by the rules of the road was repugnant to him as savouring of revolution and anarchy.

"Do you think you are much hurt, Jack?" asked Badsworth, wiping the cold perspiration off his friend's brow as he lay on the sofa in the *Blunderbore's* main cabin.

"I feel all crushed; I think it must be something wrong with my chest—and ribs—great pain inside."

"We shall be in harbour directly and get a doctor. Cheer up, old fellow; it may be nothing. A broken rib or two often feels very bad at first."

Jack shook his head, and even that movement caused him to wince with agony.

"Is the old ship gone?" he asked.

"What does the ship matter? Oh, Jack, I trust you are not badly hurt!"

"I'm sorry, though, for the ship. The *Blunderbore* might have——"

"D——n the *Blunderbore!* Coddleboys ought to be shut up as a dangerous idiot, and his skipper hanged. Is the pain just as bad?"

"Yes, very difficult to bear. Are we near the harbour now?"

Badsworth ran up on deck, and returned immediately.

"Close by. They are signalling for a doctor."

"And—— Oh, my God! this pain is awful. A telegram to——"

"Oh yes, of course, Jack. Mrs. Chillingham will know it in an hour, and catch the evening express. Be here by nine o'clock."

"Thank you, Baddy," said Jack, with a feeble motion, as if to press his friend's hand. "I shall like to see her. She's very—very pretty, isn't she, Baddy?"

The pain was making him almost unconscious of what he said.

Badsworth bit his lips. It is hard to look on with proper indifference at a fellow-creature's sufferings, whatever the philosophers may formulate.

The doctor was not long in making up his mind.

"You should telegraph to his relations at once," he said. "The poor young man will scarcely live through the night. He has received fearful internal injuries."

"Poor fellow!" said Lord Coddleboys, when he heard the news. "But to have him die on board my vessel! It really is quite unusual—devilish annoying. Wilkins, go and order dinner at the Marine Hotel."

CHAPTER XL.

Dear as remembered kisses after death,
And sweet as those by hopeless fancy feigned
On lips that are for others : deep as love,
Deep as first love, and wild with all regret :
Oh, death in life, the days that are no more.

TENNYSON.

Dans la pauvre âme humaine
La meilleure pensée est toujours incertaine,
Mais une larme coule et ne se trompe pas.

DE MUSSET.

"WHAT o'clock is it ?" asked Jack, feebly.

Badsworth glanced at the handsome clock fixed above the cabin stove—a clock presented to the Most Noble the Marquis of Coddleboys by the members of the Royal Spittlelick Yacht Club, "as a slight mark of their esteem and admiration for his lordship, both as a man and a commodore."

"A quarter to nine. She will be here in half an hour. Do you feel any worse, old fellow ?"

"No ; only weaker. The pain is less. I suppose one can't die without having some warning—half an hour's warning. It would be so terrible, my God ! never to see her again—never to——"

His words came slowly, and towards the end of the sentence became inaudible. The silence was only broken by the ripple of the water against the ship's side, as she swung head to the tide, and an occasional burst of primitive song from one or other of the yachts lying around. In consequence of the accident there were to be no fireworks, but the crews did not see why a little private music should also be forbidden.

Good-bye, Charlie! While you're on the sea
Write me a letter, love—send me a letter, love.
Good-bye, Charlie! While you are away
Do not forget your Nellie, d—a—arling!

came in as a strange accompaniment to the dying man's groans and laboured breathing.

Jack caught the words of the song.

"Mine is a long voyage—no letter—nothing but to be forgotten!" he murmured.

"Oh no, Jack!" cried Badsworth, tears starting to his eyes as he leant over the sofa. "No, no, my old friend—I shall never—she will never—forget you!"

"Yes—you will—you should. Don't think I am so selfish as to wish—— What time is it? Surely it is half-past nine now."

"Just. The train is sure to be rather late. There's a fly waiting at the station, and Keyser will be there to—to break it to her. Or would you rather I went?"

"No—don't go—I might—it sounds cowardly—but I shouldn't like to die alone. She is sure to have got your telegram, isn't she?"

"Certain. I sent one to Eaton Square to make sure, and I also telegraphed to your man-servant to take the news to her wherever she might be dining. Your people will come down too, you know."

Jack moved restlessly, and the pain caused him to give a sharp cry.

"Yes, they'll come, of course," he said, when Badsworth had given him some of the stuff sent by the doctor; "but—they'll leave me alone with her—at least at the last, I want to tell her all. Oh, Baddy, I behaved so ill to her. Poor Alice, my poor darling. One day I was mad, and I insulted her in the park; will she forgive me, do you think? It is easy to forgive a dying man, they say. You don't know how I loved her—I don't think she knows—but she will know now, she must believe me now."

He spoke half to himself, and seemed to require no

answer; and Badsworth could not have made one, for his heart was very full.

The clock with the grand inscription struck ten. Its tone was rich and pompous, and it must have been ashamed to register the last moments of a miserable wretch with but a few hundreds a year.

"Ten! She must have missed the train!" There was despair in Jack's voice.

"It may have been late. There! I hear the boat coming alongside."

"Go on deck, Baddy, and ask *them all* not to come down for a minute. I want to see her alone first. I can't die without being sure she loves me in spite of all."

Badsworth hurried up the companion to find no one on deck but Keyser.

"Why, where——?" he began.

"Never came. Not a sign of anyone. I sent another telegram, and got the station-master to arrange for a special to be ready at Waterloo, so she may come at any moment yet. How is he?"

"Sinking fast. God grant she may come in time! Oh, Keyser, I scarcely dare go down and tell him."

"It is hard—awful. But she is sure to come—perhaps dining out, and the stupid servant made some mistake. One or other of the telegrams *must* have reached her; and then there was one to the Brocklesbys."

But unfortunately no one happened to know that Alice was at Rose Villa, for she had first gone to Mrs. Belfort's and been driven by that lady to the railway-station.

The disappointment obviously hastened the end; the hope of seeing his wife had to some extent buoyed Jack up hitherto. He gave way to despondency now, and became weaker every hour.

Eleven—twelve. The stern clock would have no compromise with time because a broken-hearted man was dying, and rang out with all its accustomed stateliness the news that another day had come.

"Never to see her again," he said. "Oh, my love! my love!"

The telegram sent to Lady Brocklesby reached her just as she was on the eve of starting with Jane for a peculiarly desirable dinner, to be followed in the same house by a still more peculiarly desirable party. It was a house the entrance to which even Lady Brocklesby had found it very difficult to force, and it certainly seemed to her that it would be madness to throw away her victory, earned by much trouble and some eating of dirt. Besides, very probably the danger was exaggerated—people did exaggerate these things so often; there was sure to be an early train, and poor Jack could be no better for their giving up this one party. Had they only been asked to the gathering after dinner it might not have mattered so much, but everyone knows that to be asked to the dinner before the party is a sign of great favour. She was not sure, indeed, that in some sort it was not her duty in this instance to put her natural feelings aside, for when Royalty is to be present an invitation is almost a command, to disobey which is a lack of loyalty. Some vague and confused reminiscence of a Spartan mother, or a Roman father sacrificing his son upon the altar of his country, came into her mind. Then a telegram might be so easily overlooked in the hurry of the moment—put in the pocket and forgotten. It might have been from his lordship, who had gone down to the country to try his torpedo in a fish-pond; it might have been on any unimportant subject. There could be nothing odd in her not reading it till they returned home that night.

"Are you ready, mamma?" asked Jane entering the room, dressed all in virgin white, and looking very fresh and pretty.

Her mother inspected her approvingly.

"Yes, my dear. We are in capital time; and I think your dress does very well. Let us go."

* * * * * * * * *

The clock in the cabin of the *Blunderbore* struck one. Keyser, pacing slowly up and down the deck in the moonlight, was hailed by an approaching boat.

"Is that the *Blunderbore!*"

"Yes."

"A telegram, sir. A shilling to pay."

"From John Smith, North Street, Park Lane, London. To Lord Badsworth, Porthampton.—Mrs. Chillingham gone out of town with Mrs. Belfort, and not yet returned. Half-past twelve o'clock."

Jack had still enough consciousness left to be aware of the receipt of this telegram, and they could not refuse to acquaint him with its contents. It seemed to revive him, and his voice became stronger than it had been for three hours.

"Will you go, Keyser—kind friend? I want to speak alone with Badsworth. Come back soon to say goodbye."

"Baddy," he went on, when the other had resumed his vigil overhead, "there is no hope now of my seeing her. I must tell *you*. Put your head down. I can't speak loud. I loved her, you know, and tried do right about her, but she—we were very happy once—she cared more for Windermere."

Badsworth was silent. It is idle to prevaricate or invent smooth things face to face with that stern truth, Death.

"She loved him very dearly, and he—I think he would be good to her ——" Badsworth made a motion of dissent, but Jack went on hurriedly, stopping now and again to take breath, and his voice growing feebler as he proceeded. "Yes—he would—he could not help it. Her heart is pure, and she is so beautiful. Tell her—my last wishes—that I, who loved her more than she knew—want her to be happy—happy and good. I want her to marry him—tell her that. Perhaps I may know of her happiness—and it would make me happy then—though I can't

see her once more.—Oh, God!—it is cruel to die without saying good-bye!—We parted almost in anger, Baddy.—Tell her that, and tell him—tell him—a dying man's prayer to him is to be good to her, to make her happier—better, perhaps—than I could."

He paused, and across the still water came the sailor's refrain—

> Good-bye Charlie, while you are away,
> Do not forget your Nellie d—a—rling!

"You will do this, Baddy, for your old pal."

"I will, so help me God!" said Badworth, holding Jack's feeble hand in both his own.

"Good-bye. I think it is come now. Tell her I loved her; tell her——"

Something like a blush came over his cheeks, as he whispered; habit even at that supreme moment making him ashamed of such a piece of un-Englishism:—

"Give me a kiss."

Badsworth pressed his lips to the cold forehead, his eyes dim with tears. "Good-bye, old friend."

And Keyser, looking in through the door, saw, and forget to moralise over the incident—saw, and coming in too late ever to exchange words with poor Jack Chillingham again, was not ashamed to sit down and weep like a woman.

CHAPTER XLI.

She may turn and hide
From the spirits that glide,
And the ghost that stands at her bedside:
But never a kiss the vow shall seal,
Nor warm embrace her bosom feel.

The Queen's Wake.

THE twenty miles or so between Rose Villa and North Street took a long time to traverse. The horses were unusually bad, and the driver who did not relish being knocked up at this hour of the night, exceptionally sulky.

In vain Windermere expostulated in strong terms, and showed his companion that his temper could sometimes at least be rather irritable. In vain he offered bribes for an increase of pace. Ill temper had conquered greed in the coachman's bosom, and he doggedly jogged along as solemnly as if he were driving a hearse.

And Alice watched the dark hedges as they passed slowly by, and had ample time to reflect on what she had done, and on the consequence thereof. It must be confessed that a more miserable lady could scarcely have been found in the land.

Flirtation is a very delicate plant; and there is nothing more fatal to it than the small *contretemps* of every-day life. It recks nothing of grand incidents, fearful storms, earthquakes, horrible accidents, but tight boots or gloves out at the finger are annihilation. Every jolt of the fly, every angry oath from Windermere, flew away with another bit of sentiment; and when they arrived, jaded and fairly tired of each other's society, at the door of her house, both were relieved to an extent they could not have believed possible a few hours before. Windermere, indeed, was accustomed to lay down that two hours

is as much as you should ever be alone with a woman; but even he had considered this in some sort an exceptional case.

"You had better come in," she said, with a weary smile; "your club will have been shut long ago, and Smith is sure to have left out some wine and water—or something."

"Thanks. That confounded flyman was enough to make anyone thirsty."

And he accompanied her upstairs.

"A telegram!—two telegrams! I wonder who they can be from!" she said listlessly, taking up the two envelopes which lay upon the table.

"Oh, please, m'm," said the servant, "I was to tell you—at least the telegrams are to say——Poor Mr. Chillingham!"

"Poor Mr. Chillingham! What——" and she nervously tore open one of the telegrams.

"My God!"

"What is it, Alice?" cried Windermere, approaching her, and, forgetting the presence of the servant, placing his arm round her, for she tottered as if about to fall. "What is the matter?"

She shook off his arm as if his touch were contagion, and faced him.

"Matter! The matter is that while I have been—been false in heart to him with you!—with you!"—she repeated the words with a bitter scorn that startled him—"he, my poor Jack, my husband, has been dying—dying! and I, who should have been at his side!—— Oh, God!"

She read and re-read the fatal telegrams with a stony look of despair. There were the words—no doubt about them. For once the telegraph clerk had written clearly enough: "Come at once. Jack is seriously hurt." And then the other, more urgent: "Come immediately if you would see him alive. Special train ordered. He is ask-

ing for you." Smith held out another: "This was received in Eaton Square two hours ago—'It is too late. I come up by next train. Wait my arrival.'"

They were all three from Badsworth.

"'Too late!' 'He is asking for me!'" cried the bewildered horror-struck girl, throwing up her arms. "Too late!—too late!"

And Windermere was only just in time to save her from falling, and to lay her on the sofa. But she did not swoon. Providence would not let her have a moment's oblivion yet.

"I will not believe it!" she cried. "It cannot be! Only three days ago so well—so—— Smith, get me a cab directly! Porthampton? It is only two hours by rail. They say a special is ordered. Go! quick! Don't you hear my order?"

"Beg your pardon, m'm, but——" hesitated the servant.

"I think," said Windermere, gently, "that you had better wait, as Badsworth tells you. You see he says—it is—too late."

"Too late!" cried she, turning on him with a strange glitter in her great eyes.

"Too late! and you dare say it to me! You, for whose sake I have sacrificed—I have sacrificed—— I hate you!"

Windermere shrugged his shoulders almost imperceptibly. He was used to the inconsequence of womankind, but was beginning to feel keenly the annoyance of a "scene."

"But I cannot stay here," she said, after a pause, during which she had again pored over those three significant telegrams. "He is asking for me, I tell you. Let me go. Why do you keep me here? He may forgive me yet, he may. I will go to him!"

She spoke wildly, and, on her way to the door, suddenly sank down on the sofa and covered her face with her hands.

They heard her murmur again, "Too late!" under her breath.

Windermere took up a "Bradshaw."

"The early train leaves Porthampton at five. Let me see. Badsworth can be here in an hour."

"An hour!" she cried, starting up again. "I cannot wait an hour. I must know all. I must——"

At that moment there was a ring at the door-bell. Badsworth had taken advantage of the sympathies of the authorities at Porthampton, and obtained an engine to bring him to town.

He entered the room now, and started as he saw Windermere. Alice's dress, the open telegrams upon the table, showed him at once the state of the case.

"You never got them?" he said, pointing to the table.

Alice seized him by the arm, her delicate fingers pressing into his flesh.

"Is he—is he——It isn't true?"

"It is true," answered Badsworth, sternly, for the sight of Windermere had taken pity from his heart. "It is true. He died a little after one o'clock this morning, very peaceably. You would like to know the particulars, I suppose. Are you able to hear them now?"

He glanced at Windermere as he spoke, and that gentleman understood the look.

"It is too terrible," murmured he, in a very touching tone of compassion—"too terrible. I had better leave you to tell her now. Poor Jack!" And with that he moved towards the door.

"Stop?" cried Alice, with startling vehemence. "No, you shall stay. It is right that you, for whose sake I have wronged the dead, should see my punishment. It is right, Lord Windermere, that you should know—as I am now to know—what was happening when you sang songs—love-songs, while he was dying—to me in the

boat. Go on, I am strong enough to hear anything now."

Poor Badsworth never had a more difficult task than that which he now set himself to do. Furious with Alice as he had been on entering, the potent spell of her beauty came upon him now with full force, and there was something in her manner which forbade him to doubt the reality of the shock that had come upon her. Simply, and as shortly as he could, he detailed the sad story, but when he came to the long hours of waiting for her, and to Jack's despair at her non-appearance, she interrupted him.

"You hear?" she said to Windermere, who had unwillingly obeyed her and remained. "You hear? To listen to your sweet speeches, to plot against his honest faith in me—me, his false wife—I did not come when he called on me in his last moments. This, his last kiss, his pardon, his love, I have given up to you—for your—what? What," she cried, in a tone of irrepressible anguish, "can you give me in exchange for this?"

Windermere did not stir. This was really getting intolerable. The woman was mad—natural, perhaps, but very disagreeable.

"I do not think," said Badsworth, gently, "I do not think he ever supposed you staid away on purpose. We knew there must be some mistake—you were out, or——"

"Do not speak to me in that way," she said. "Do not look kindly at me. I am a murderess—the murderess of a heart. Oh, Jack, Jack! I did love you! I know it now, and I can never tell you so! Where is he? Let me give him one kiss. Come with me to him, Lord Windermere, and stand there while I tell him so—and say 'No' to it if you can."

She raised her head defiantly, and looked Windermere in the face.

"You had better go," whispered Badsworth to him. "Your presence seems to hurt her"—and his lordship promptly availed himself of the opportunity.

"He will be here very soon," said Badsworth, as Alice stood in the same still attitude, as if carved in stone.

"And he will forgive me? Oh, say you think he will forgive me. But no—he is dead, dead—and I love him."

"He did forgive you, my poor child," said Badsworth, taking both her hands in his. "His last words were love for you."

"His last words—and I—O God? I shall go mad! It cannot be true! Say it's all a joke—you are making fun of me, dear, good Lord Badsworth? Don't go on with it any more—it is rather—I mean—tell me the truth. You have only done it to punish me for what I did? Let it stop now, for it tries me too much."

Her eager eyes gazed into Badsworth's with something of the fire of madness in them as she clutched his arm with nervous hands.

"It is too true," he said.

"True! true! And I was false; but I was never false to myself. I know all now. I never loved him," pointing with a contemptuous gesture to the door through which Windermere had departed; "and now—too late."

Not a tear came as she rocked herself backwards and forwards seated on the sofa, with low moans of despair.

The exquisite hat, which had been the admiration of the guests of Rose Villa, had slipped aside; her dark hair was dishevelled in a manner which would have carried despair to the soul of Mrs. Perkins; her face was white as death; and black rims had already formed beneath her unnaturally staring eyes. But Badsworth had never looked upon anything more beautiful, more sad, than this young widow in her despair and self-reproach.

What she suffered then she has never, she will never, tell to anyone; but when a few hours afterwards Bads-

worth left her alone with the body of her husband—the "it" which is always invested with so mysterious an awe—he thought he had never read in human face so sad a tale of hopelessness and profound misery. Who shall say what passed in that darkened room during the long hours that Alice, tearless still, watched by the side of him who would never smile on her again?

There is grief so intense that no words can describe it, sadness so deep that no on-looker can appreciate a thousandth part of it.

CHAPTER XLII.

Her tears fell with the dews at even:
Her tears fell ere the dews were dried;
She could not look on the sweet heaven,
Either at noon or eventide.

TENNYSON.

The bells shall ring, the clerk shall sing,
The good old wife shall winde us;
And the sexton shall lay our bodies in the clay,
Where nobody shall find us.

New Academy of Compliments.

THOSE of Lady Brocklesby's intimates who were admitted to her at this time of her grief were much impressed by the redness of her eyes and nose, and by all the other signs of maternal affection which she exhibited. That he had not always been a good son to her she frankly admitted; "but one forgets all that now!" she exclaimed, between her sobs. "If I could only have seen the poor boy once more, and told him how freely and fully I forgave him; how my mother's heart bled for him; I should be happier. But it is some consolation to us to think that we did all we could; and that all we have now to do is to bow to the decrees of an all-wise Providence. 'He gives; He takes away.' That is a beautiful passage. Poor boy! His has been a sad history—a wasted life. That woman was a great trial to us, my dear. How could it be otherwise? No birth, no breeding, and—ah! we could have borne all that—but no character. That is what hurts us. Such a disgrace to the whole family. I'm sure I hope poor Jane's prospects are not irretrievably ruined by such a connection. Of course we shall have nothing more to do with her—but she was my son's wife. And the way she got over Lord Windermere was wonder-

ful. She met him here, you know, a good deal, when his attentions to Jane were very marked. All these stories true, dear? Yes, I fear so. She was telegraphed for over and over again, but was at Maidenhead with Lord Windermere. Isn't it terrible? It is all very well to talk calmly over such things, as we often do, but when they happen in one's own family, ah! then one knows what they really are!"

People carried away with them from Lady Brocklesby's presence a confused idea that her ladyship was very good and long-suffering; and that Jack's death was especially intended by Providence to show how far goodness and long-suffering could be carried. The affair of the telegram she kept discreetly locked in her own breast, and if she did in the corner thereof feel a regret that even such a party as she and Jane had enjoyed that night should have stood in the way of her again seeing her son alive, still there could be but little doubt that she had done her duty to society, and surely society comes before individuals.

She rather enjoyed a lazy existence of sal-volatile and sympathy, tempered by pretty religious adulation and self-abasement; and, seated with her back to the light, and a supply of pocket-handkerchiefs at hand, there was really something very touching about the extreme good taste of her resignation.

Grief is so often apt to be vulgar and unpleasing, that it was a pleasure to come across so soft and refined an article as this.

We will not go so far as to say that no one was sorry for Jack but Alice and Badsworth. Many of his friends, taken by his frank boyish manners, were very sorry for a day or two.

It is a mere platitude to say that the dead are not remembered; and, although there is something pathetic in the ease with which a life goes entirely out of view and remembrance almost simultaneously, the pathos is more

or less artificial after all. If the gaps left by those who fall were not instantly filled up, we should not be a very useful army to fight the enemies around us on every side.

Alice's terror at the approach of the moment when *it* would be taken away and hidden under ground was becoming hourly more intense, when she was as much surprised as she could be then by the entrance of Spencer Chillingham, who had but just arrived from America, and had grown a long tuft under his chin. Lord Brocklesby had called at the house, as had also Emily Garter, bursting with satisfaction at the assistance propriety was receiving from the "hand of Providence," and Minna Belfort, who had a kind of loyalty in her nature; but Alice had refused to see anyone. To be alone with her remorse was all she asked now.

Spencer, by asserting that he came on business connected with the funeral, was however permitted to enter.

The head of the coffin had been left open, and the candlelight fell upon Jack's face, calm and peaceful, and on the girlish figure that bent over it.

Spencer had need of all his philosophy, but it did not fail him, and he commenced his business in a matter-of-fact tone.

"The funeral has been arranged for to-morrow?" he said, after a few awkward expressions of sympathy, which Alice scarcely noticed. She bowed assent, and clutched the sides of the coffin with both hands, as if to defy them to remove it.

"At Wokingham?"

She gave a low cry. There was something in the mention of the place which reminded her of how far he was away from her. Had she not reproved him on one occasion when, relating some of his early Aldershot adventures, he had spoken laughingly of the "cold meat train," and explained to her the meaning of the name?

How little they either of them then thought——but Spencer went on.

"Yes; my father was so far right as to object to all the fuss and nonsense of sending—sending it—down to the country. Funerals are an abomination altogether; a farce, and an unhealthy one. Now, poor Jack was above all vulgar prejudices. Don't you think so?"

He put up his eyeglass in almost a pathetic manner as he asked this question.

"Yes," she said, not attending to his words, but only conscious some answer was required of her.

"Oh yes! He was so good—so kind! Jack! my love! My own Jack!"

It would have seemed that only a fiend could have tortured further the poor child, sobbing her heart out over the coffin; but then Spencer, although kind at heart, was a philosopher, and was just now under the influence of a new hobby. Philanthropy is generally wholly regardless of others, and would rather do harm than be defrauded of its own especial style of benevolence.

"You have an opportunity now of showing that you are above them too. Jack's death may be made the commencement of a great movement which shall do inestimable good to the human race. Did it ever strike you that incalculable harm is done by the present style of burial?"

Alice had once heard her husband, when what he called "mugging up" politics for the electors of Shodborough, speak of the Burials Question; so she said vaguely, "You mean about the service. I shouldn't like anything to be different now to what is usually done."

"Oh, I don't allude to the religious or sectarian view of the question, though of course that must be settled soon: the words 'ashes to ashes, dust to dust,' in our service are more applicable, by-the-bye, to the right kind of sepulture than the wrong. No; what I allude to is the actual disposal of—of the body."

Alice opened her eyes wide—eyes looking all the larger because of the wanness of her face—but said nothing.

"There is nothing but red-tapeism, vulgar clinging to habits because they are habits, blind fear of change, which prevents the whole world taking at once to our plan. All we want is a few examples among the upper classes. People are so silly as to think a man with a good coat is more likely to be right than a man with a bad one. Now, here is a capital opportunity. He, poor fellow, would not have objected, and I cannot believe you will object. Cremation, there can be no doubt, is——"

Alice started up.

"You wan't to burn him!"

"Merely reduce the remains to a white ash, which, placed in an urn of whatever pattern you like, and which I should be glad to provide, would be as worthily sepultured there, surely, as slowly rotting in the ground, and disseminating poisonous vapours around."

"Go away," said she, with a feeble wave of her hand. "Go away. Oh, my Jack, my poor boy, they want to take you from me and burn you, to leave me quite alone—alone in the world, and to burn you!"

"It is folly to associate companionship with what is nothing but so much matter to be disposed of in the best way," said Spencer, holding his ground, but requiring all his philosophy to do so. Either his eyeglass was very bad, or it had become unaccountably damped and blurred his vision. Still he held his ground.

"Put aside such folly, Alice. I tell you that you have an opportunity of doing much good, and at the sacrifice only of an utterly reasonless scruple. In an oven heated up to——"

But Alice could bear no more. Crying out to him once again to leave her, she flung herself upon the coffin, encircling it with her arms, and went into violent hysterics.

No philosopher alive but would be conquered by hysterics; and, after calling for assistance, our specimen fled, thoroughly ashamed of the weakness shown by his

eyeglass, and wondering what it was that caused the strange and unwonted feeling of a lump in his throat.

The next morning dawned, dark and dismal, with masses of clouds fleeting rapidly across the sky. No one was in the street but a policeman and a belated gentleman in evening clothes, with a singular bad opera-hat, trying to persuade his legs to carry him home without unnecessary and undignified detour.

Then came some workmen, proceeding to their daily toil no doubt. No, they stop at No. —, North Street. Alice hears the sound as one of them gently draws out the bell-pull. The noise of a carriage—very late even for the most enthusiastic cotillon dancers. No carriage for the living—the carriage that takes us our last drive. Nodding plumes and seedy-looking men in black. Alice looks out of the window. That equipage, with its unreal air of woe, has a strange fascination for her; she scarcely can realize that it has come to take from her all that is left of him she wronged and loved. Yes, she loved him. Does anyone dare to deny it? Her tortured heart for ever asked this question defiantly. Two of the men come upstairs and enter the room. Goggles barks fiercely, and one of them laughs at the grotesque little creature's impotent ferocity. That laugh rouses her. She dashes to the door, but it is too late. They are in the room. Smith and Wilkins appear behind them. Alice feels herself alone in the midst of her enemies. With a wild cry she clasps the coffin, her head resting upon it. They screwed it up the night before, despite all her efforts; and she has torn her tender fingers trying in vain to open it again.

"Let me see him once more!" she cries. Then, as they lay hold of it, one on either side, she contends fiercely with them, trying to unclasp their hands.

"You shall not!" she shrieks. "It is mine! It is mine! What right have you to take him away? Leave go—oh leave go! I will pay you well to leave him here.

See! here is my purse! One—two—pounds, and I have some at the bank. I will write a cheque. But do not take him away!"

"Poor thing!" said one of the men, perplexed.

"Come away with me, ma'am," said Wilkins, the maid. "You'd best come away."

"They shall not take it, Wilkins. Smith, order them from the house. It is mine, is it not? Make them go! Only one day more—let me have it one day more—only one!"

"You see, mum," said the honest servant—whose experiences, though vast according to his account of them to admiring footmen, did not quite enable him to meet this difficulty—"you see, all the arrangements are made; and one day or another won't make any difference to you, mum, after it's over."

It is possible that even this argument might have failed of its logical effect if Alice had not fainted away.

When she awoke it was to an illness which mercifully deprived her of the power of thought; and Jack soon lay among the hundreds of forgotten dead. The clergyman who performed the ceremony was much pleased by the presence of the Duke of Cheshire at the funeral, and perhaps he had never read the service with more pathos and correctness than on this occasion.

CHAPTER XLIII.

It sounds like stories from the land of spirits,
If any man obtain that which he merits,
Or any merit that which he obtains.

COLERIDGE.

Kepe ye content awhile, so that your tongues ye holde,
Methinkes you shuld remembre, this is no place to scolde.

Gammer Gurton's Needle.

THERE was but one opinion in London as to Alice's behaviour. Some, indeed, said she had lit Windermere's cigarette with the telegram announcing Jack's accident; others that she had telegraphed back to the effect that she could not come, being better employed. Dark hints were even thrown out that the accident was not quite so accidental as might be supposed; although how Alice could have been in league with Lord Coddleboys' skipper was not explained. But the universal opinion was that she had passed the bounds of tolerance. And, strangely enough, all the anger against her was not mixed up with much pity for Jack.

A man unlucky in his wife is never the object of strong sympathy, save from those who are, or suspect they soon may be, in a like strait; and many people talked of the poor fellow's fortnight's cruise in the English Channel in much the same way as they might have spoken of a voyage to the Antipodes.

"Why did he leave her alone?" they asked. And often they went on to speak of small establishments elsewhere than in North Street, of whole families of hidden children, of Don Juanism infinite.

The weekly papers inserted mysterious articles, which

were delightful puzzles to their many readers, as keen for scandal as terriers for rats:

"It is said—with what truth we know not—that a certain noble lord, whose eccentricities are proverbial, is much embarrassed by the discovery that his son, whose sad death by accident on board a yacht we all deplore, has left no less than three widows to bewail his loss, and, what is worse, to demand jointures at his lordship's hands."

Then a week later:

"It is not true that poor Jack C—— had embraced the doctrines of polygamy. Far from it; we understand that he was above vulgar prejudices of any kind, and was *never married at all!* Lord W—— is horror-struck at the matrimonial danger he has escaped."

In another of these journals there appeared the following:

"So poor Jack Chillingham has gone over to the majority! Well, he wasn't a bad fellow; could take his liquor like a man, and, if he *had* a wonderful knack of producing the king at *écarté*, *de mortuis*, &c."

Again:

"The American lady, whose beauty electrified us this season, is so inconsolable at her sudden loss of a husband that she has determined to take another one at once. The favourites are a noble lord whose good looks and great riches are well known, and a young viscount in the Guards who was lately bereaved of his yacht. But neither of them likes the prospect."

Alice at length yielded to the peremptory commands of her doctor, and took a drive round Regent's Park, closely veiled. But veils were no protection against the piercing glance of McSquirter, of *The Piccadilly Pioneer*, who happened to be taking a constitutional, and imbibing ideas with the pure air there; and in his next issue appeared a crushing paragraph:

"A fair lady, about whom all London is talking, not in her praise, appeared in public last Tuesday. It was curious to see with what a sudden blindness her quondam acquaintances were seized as she passed."

Of course Alice never knew of all this. Nor, poor child, would she have cared much had she known. But Badsworth was driven nearly mad by it all, and eyed the collection of whips and canes in the corner of his room with savage longing. His promise to Jack weighed upon his spirits, and it was some time before he could muster up sufficient resolution to fulfil it.

Meeting Windermere one afternoon at The Buccaneer Club, however, he determined to get it off his conscience, and asking the other to go with him into an empty card-room, which looked gloomily dissipated in the day-light, he, as shortly and simply as possible, recounted what had passed between Jack and himself in the cabin of the *Blunderbore*. Windermere was half-amused, half-angry at what he considered the other's impertinent meddling.

"Really, Badsworth," he said, "I cannot allow anyone to interfere in my affairs."

His haughty tone roused Badsworth at once.

"I scarcely see how you can take that line in this case. I am to blame in not having spoken sooner to you in the matter."

"You are to blame in speaking at all."

Badsworth made an effort to be calm.

"My promise to poor Chillingham——"

"Does not excuse anything. You had no business to make such a promise."

"You will permit me to be the judge of that."

"It is no moment to me what folly you may commit, unless it entails any impertinence to myself."

"Impertinence! Lord Windermere, I advise you to choose your words more carefully. I have a right to an answer from you."

"You have no right to speak one word to me of my private affairs. As to this particular absurdity, if you had a spark of knowledge of the world, you would be aware of how inexcusable it is. A lady does me the honour to like me; we accidentally miss a train; the world chooses to put a harsh construction on it, which I admit is very annoying to us both——"

"Annoying!"

"Allow me to finish what I have to say. The world is wrong, no doubt; but the world's mouth is too large to muzzle. We have to bear it. As to what you call my 'duty,' I can scarcely believe you are in your senses to come to *me* with such transparent humbug. You thrust yourself into an affair with which you have nothing to do, and then you are astonished when I tell you are impertinent."

"I am not going to have that said to me twice, Lord Windermere," said Badsworth, his face white with anger.

Now Windermere had just finished a very good luncheon, and two or three large glasses of sherry make a very good substitute for natural courage.

"Won't you? Take care, my good friend, lest with your talent for meddling in other people's concerns you don't get kicked some fine day."

The calm sneer was perfect. Windermere was celebrated for his calm, aggravating sneers. He was much the taller and the stronger man of the two, and rather enjoyed the excitement of the quarrel.

"Will *you* kick me, my lord?" asked Badsworth, coming close up to him and looking dangerous.

"It would be a great deal of trouble," said the other, in ultra-languid tones. "But I suppose I should if necessary.

"Take that, then, you infernal scoundrel!" cried Badsworth, losing all self-control.

The "that" was a smart cut over the face with the back of his hand, which Windermere was too late to ward off.

The shock and the sherry combined made him a giant in his righteous self-defence. A vulgar brawl in a club was certainly distasteful, but when a man is angry the immediate use of his natural weapon is pleasant to him, particularly if he be bigger than his antagonist.

One blow in the face, quickly followed by another artistically planted between the eyes, and Badsworth, tripping against a footstool, came heavily to the ground, just as three or four members, startled by the angry tones and other sounds of combat, burst tumultuously into the room. Badsworth rose quickly, but of course no further display of pugilism was permitted.

"He struck me, gentlemen," said Windermere, looking very cool, and quickly arranging his cuff, which had become somewhat ruffled, "and I was obliged to knock him down in self-defence. I am sorry such a scene should have occurred here—very sorry—but it was no fault of mine."

"I struck him," said Badsworth, looking very dishevelled and unheroic, "because he is a scoundrel."

"You see!" said Windermere, with a smile of lofty contempt. "The matter must be placed in the hands of the committee. Rainford, will you see about calling a meeting. I, of course, cannot attend, but shall be happy to give you all information in my power; and I daresay Lord Badsworth will explain how it was that a difference he has with me concerning a lady—whose name I at least must refuse to mention—has made him forget

the rules that hitherto have governed gentlemen, which up to this moment I thought all the members of this club were."

The Marquis was plainly master of the situation, and the indignation against Badsworth was universal. Good heavens! People outside would say that The Buccanneer Club was rowdy—that the members settled their differences by vulgar fisticuffs—an example must be made!

A few days afterwards the committee met, and, acting on Rule XIII., which enabled them to return the subscription and erase the name of any member who "behaved in a manner immoral, ungentlemanlike, or prejudicial to the interests of the club"—for the Buccaneers were very strict except in money matters—decided that Badsworth should be requested to withdraw from their innocent society.

But before this, Badsworth—confined to his room with a black eye and swelled lip—had written to demand Windermere's instant presence in Belgium, and the letter was promptly laid before his commanding-officer. This offence, added to the disgrace of being expelled his club, necessitated his withdrawal from his regiment, of which he was foolish enough to be very fond. Thus ended his first and last attempt to vindicate the laws of friendship, honour, and morality!

All right-minded persons will, no doubt, think he was justly served. Nothing can of course excuse violence in these days of frock-coats and chimney-pot hats; and as to that immoral institution, the *duello*, thank Heaven we live in a land where there are judges, police, damages for defamation, and above all, a sound and educated Public Opinion!

To crown all, Alice was very indignant with him for having, as she said, humiliated her in such a manner. "To think," she cried, looking very pretty in her widow's weeds, "that you should suppose I could ever forget Jack! It was cruel of you, Lord Badsworth! Your pro-

mise! Oh, I cannot, I will not, believe that Jack ever thought me so heartless, so wicked. But I forgive you."

Then, indeed, Badsworth began to see that there was something in this life as we lead it that was past his comprehension, as perhaps there was.

Be it remembered that he was young, and had not wholly put aside the voice of enthusiasm, which, being a blunder, is worse than a crime. Be it remembered that to his innocently obtuse mind this splendid Public Opinion, that we—who are wise—all love and revere so much, was only the outcoming or effect of a variety of causes, mostly mean and sordid; that he had not yet accurately gauged the extent to which moral obliquity is absolutely necessary to worldly eyesight; that, in fact, he was not yet, what by the grace of society he might, perhaps, still become, by careful observance of the most successful of his fellows, a true humbug—we apologise—a thorough "man of the world." He did not yet know, as we, the initiated, know, that as poison is often used for medicinal purposes, so falsehood is necessary to bring out the grand truths of life; that wisdom now is best rendered by cunning; that friendship means gratitude for services to come. Let us hope that some day, when he has lived down his present disgrace, he will, by fully recognising these facts, be able to jog along pleasantly with the rest of us, treading on no corns by reason of over-obtrusive honesty!

The only drawback to Windermere's triumph was that the Duke of Cheshire, whom he rather reverenced as one of the last of a race to whose grandeur even he could not quite aspire, cut him dead whenever they met. "I have never," he said to Flittery, "been so bothered about a woman before."

"Poor old chap," muttered Mr. Flittery, twisting one of his lordship's magnificent cigars about in his white fingers, "it certainly has been uncommonly hard upon you."

CHAPTER XLIV.

Tout est dit ! le bonheur s'est enfui pour toujours :
Et mon cœur vivra solitaire.
A tous les monuments ruinés de mes jours
J'ai cueilli la pariètaire.

HOUSSAYE.

"I DON'T understand what they all mean," said Lady Meldrum. "Do they think that no one can throw stones at *them?* The idea of Lady Newmarket setting herself up! She of all people!"

"You forget," said the Duke of Cheshire, rather sadly, "you forget the Eleventh Commandment."

"No, I don't. Thou shalt not commit——"

He interrupted her rather hastily.

"Thou shalt not be found out."

"Oh—ah—well, I daresay. I never heard it before. I've so many things to do, you know, and I never had much education. But, Duke, can we do nothing for this poor child?"

"I fear not. The fiat has gone forth. She is to be sent irretrievably to Coventry."

"Coventry! What a horrid place! Where people hang with grooms and porters on the bridge, and women ride on horseback without any clothes. It *is* the most cruel thing. I'll ask her to my parties, at any rate."

"To be cut by everyone. Besides, she absolutely refuses to go anywhere. No, my dear lady, we can do nothing for her in that line. What I wanted you, with your kind heart, to do is to find out how we can assist her in other ways. She has no relatives in the world of her own, and the Brocklesbys have, as you know, cast her off."

"As if that mattered! The Brocklesbys are——"

"Yes; but you see it does matter. It means bread-and-butter to her."

"You don't mean to say they would let her starve?"

"Not quite, but very nearly. It isn't his fault; but he's afraid of his wife."

Lady Meldrum thought of her lord, and was silent.

"And his wife has ordained, as far as I can make out, that our little Alice is to go as near to starvation as possible. She has been put by them, I suppose, in a wretched brick house at Clapham." (His grace shuddered at the idea.) "And I want you to arrange that she should move to some nicer place which I would gladly give her. You see, she's my relation."

"Duke, you're a gentleman!" cried the old lady, impulsively. "Of course I will arrange it. Do you know, sometimes I wonder whether our code is quite just. There's Alice Chillingham, so pretty that no man could help making love to her—no man who was a man, at least—even poor dear Meldrum made eyes at her, and I caught him—it was splendid! And then, on the other hand, there is myself—look at me, I'm as good-looking as ever I was—and that's not saying much. Tut, tut, man, don't I see myself in the glass every day? What temptation have I had compared to that lovely child? To say nothing of being as rich as I want to be, while she has had to struggle to put gowns on her back. No, Duke, things are not fairly arranged in this world, though you and I have no cause to complain."

"I don't know," said the Duke, rather absently, and forgetting to whom he spoke. "Complaining depends upon temperament. We all have cause enough. Looking back on opportunities wasted—on unmitigated laziness and selfishness—the retrospect is not a happy one. But," he went on, rousing himself and half smiling at the idea of moralising to Lady Meldrum—"but this has nothing to do with the subject. Lady Brocklesby wishes to keep Alice out of society, an outcast, at Clapham, all

her days—and moreover she wishes existence to be a struggle for her. We must prevent it. You have already been good to her, and she would take from you what she would, I fancy, fling back in my face. May I rely upon you?"

"That you may," said the old woman, with emphasis.

But it was of no avail. Alice accepted, with apparent eagerness, the *rôle* marked out for her by her mother-in-law; and accompanied by her maid and Goggles, retired to the dreary little house kindly taken for her by that lady.

The awfully sudden bereavement she had sustained, coming, as it did, at a moment when she had just put aside her honour and been false to her plighted troth, had utterly broken her down, and she had even listened meekly to a joint lecture delivered to her by Emily Garter and the pious Lady Clementina Greyswell. It was not to pluck a brand from the burning that these ladies came; that was not the aim of their kindly religious principles; it was rather to convince the brand that it was destined to be utterly destroyed. They left her proud of the despair they believed they had filled her with; and attributed to their gloomy prophecies what was the effect of the remorse consuming her.

Before the season was over, Windermere, having a latent fear that the Duke of Cheshire and Lady Meldrum between them might yet compass his marriage with the lady whose pretty ways had served to while away a season, but whose position was not such as to make her worthy to wear the celebrated Windermere diamonds, engaged himself to a sweet girl of seventeen, just come out, the third daughter of a ducal house which was noted for its matrimonial successes—a house which seemed, indeed, to have a vested interest in all the rich young men of London, so naturally did it appropriate them whenever it sent a tender scion into the world. The young woman had perhaps some school-room notions of a

love-match, and scarcely cared to be disposed of so arbitrarily—

> But Strephon sighed so loud and strong
> He blew a settlement along;
> And bravely drove his rivals down
> With coach-and-six and house in town.
> The bashful nymph no more withstands,
> Because her dear papa commands.

And soon everything was as pleasantly arranged as could be, and all the friends and acquaintances of each family, and many who aspired to rank in that number, began to seek for wedding-gifts which should make as much show for as little cost as possible.

Poor little Jane Chillingham, who had cherished in her heart of hearts a romantic admiration for the good-looking lord, pined for a short time, and read a great deal of poetry about broken hearts and lonely lives and solitude and desolation, in the retirement of her bedroom; and Lady Brocklesby hinted darkly that *she* was not one of those who would sacrifice her daughter on the altar of mere worldly prosperity; but a very magnificent ormolu inkstand, which her ladyship obtained a bargain, figured among the list of presents in *The Morning Post* nevertheless.

* * * * * *

In one of the most sad-looking and respectable of all the sad-looking and respectable houses of Clapham* sat our poor unworthy heroine, fallen from her high estate, her name smirched, her happiness departed. Yet she still ventured to be fair; and might, perhaps, were it not for a proud obstinacy which misfortune had strengthened, have

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* We beg to say, in deprecation of Claphamite anger, that we are well aware there are many charming residences there; but near the railway there are long stretches of two storied stucco houses which seem the very abomination of desolation.

been happy yet. She knew well enough that Badsworth needed but a sign to fly to her feet. She recognised now his unselfish devotion, and she was grateful to him for it; but no consideration whatever would induce her to break the oath she had sworn to herself over her husband's corpse—nothing turn her from the life of repentance she had vowed to lead.

Mrs. Wilkins enters hurriedly, eager, as all servants are, to impart bad news. "Goggles seems odd, mum; took with a fit, I think." The little wretch of a dog who had but one good quality—love for his mistress—opens his glazing eye, attempts, but abortively, to give a wag of his uncurling tail, and with a last effort licks Alice's hand. Then there is a shiver, and he is gone to the happy hunting-grounds, where he may have more success than he had with the too fleet rabbits in this life of disappointment.

"And if you please, mum," says Mrs. Wilkins, after paying a due compliment to the defunct, "I should like to leave at my month. I couldn't bear this place any longer, it is so dreadful lonesome, and not what I've been accustomed to."

It is the last straw. Alice lays down her little head and weeps. No Goggles, no Wilkins! Everything that reminded her of the past to go! Trivial, childish, is it not? But, after all, life is made up to a great extent of trivialities, and many of our most poignant griefs are very childish.

Then, to feed the flames of her grief, she extracts from her desk a letter—read nearly every day—which was found among Jack's papers. It was probably written in one of his dark hours of jealousy, and had been accidentally kept.

"My love—for you are my love—I forgive you. God knows whether things might have been otherwise—whether I am to blame—it is too late to think of that

now. You will only get this letter when we shall meet no more. Alice, it wasn't your fault—you tried to love me—I know it. But it could not be. My heart is broken—but it is by Fate and not by you. Think sometimes, oh, my darling, of the happy days before you found out that you did not love me. Think sometimes of our happy talks about our future together. How little we dreamed then that we could separate!—that there was no such thing as *our* future! I have the past at least, Alice. You cannot—*he* cannot—rob me now of the recollection of that, lost though it is now. It was no pretence, it was no delusion. You *did* love me—do not say you did not—that when your eyes met mine they did not speak the truth. Before such love as mine no lie could live—the moment the change came, my heart knew it and warned me. Think of me sometimes, Alice—the thought of me can do you no harm; for, as regards you, at least, I have no blame to fear. Be good, dear; try to think of me as a friend who would fain still watch over you, and do not hurt me more than I can bear. You were made for a far higher position than I could give you. You are the loveliest woman on the earth. But be good, my love, be good. Good-bye."

Incoherent, badly written, blotted—but it came from the depths of a true man's heart.

And Alice, staining the paper with her tears, prayed for that release which the grave face of the second-rate physician who paid her so many visits dimly foreshadowed.

It is sad when the heart dies before the machine which it animates is quite worn out.

* * * * * *

So Lady Brocklesby got the settlement of the little property in Hampshire for which her soul had longed,

and Jack and Alice Chillingham were as thoroughly forgotten in "London Society" as we shall be, oh reader! when our grandchildren, dressed in the prevailing fashion, pass over our mouldy graves to worship their Creator according to the lights of the day.

Ainsi tout change, ainsi tout passe:
Ainsi nous-mêmes nous passons,
Sans laisser, hélas! plus de trace
Que cette barque où nous glissons
Sur cette mer où tout s'efface.

THE END.

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